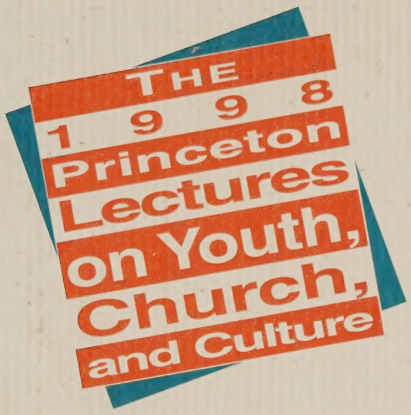

Growing Up Postmodern:

Imitating Christ in the Age of 'Whatever'

Nancy T. Ammerman
Hartford Seminary Center for Social and Religious Research

Martin E. Marty
University of Chicago

Sharon Daloz Parks
Whidbey Institute

Friedrich Schweitzer
University of Tübingen

William Willimon
Duke University

Institute for Youth Ministry
Princeton Theological Seminary

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Introduction

Descartes is history. That's the conclusion of postmodernity. Foundational truth is out, relativity is in. Trace it to Hiroshima, the assassination of John F. Kennedy, the Challenger explosion. Technology is not the panacea we thought it would be. Trace it to Watergate, liposuction, spin doctors. Truth is not an objective reality anymore. Trace it to institutional differentiation, Baskin Robbins, cable TV. Choice can paralyze as well as liberate.

Nobody knows this better than the young people whose coming of age coincides with the turn of the millennium. They live in a world where microchips are obsolete every eighteen months, information is instantaneous, and parents change on weekends. The one constant in the postmodern adolescent's experience is upheaval. Truth changes daily. The signature quality of adolescence is no longer lawlessness, but awelessness. Go ahead, youth say to the church. Impress me. When everything is true, nothing is true. Whatever.

It's true that we live in a world that considers truth too relative to specify. The comics brought us mutant "X-Men" and now "X-Women"; consumer thinking brought us X-brands and X-spouses; pop culture brought us *X-Files* and Generation X. The letter "X" is having a banner decade, labeling "whatever" we don't have the time or the inclination to explain.

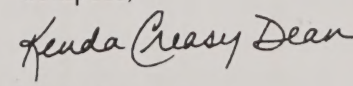
Maybe the word "whatever" found its way into the contemporary adolescent vocabulary because "X" describes precisely the Truth they seek. In the early church, the Greek letter "X" (*chi*) referred to Jesus Christ. This generation of young people is neither the first nor the last in search of "X." Paul recognized this quest in the Athenians, who went as far as to erect an altar to "an unknown god":

> What you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. . .The One who is Lord of heaven and earth. . . made all nations. . . so that they would search for God. . . . God will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom God has appointed, and of this we are assured because God raised him from the dead. (Acts 17:23-31)

We all seek "X," God's Truth beyond relativity. We are here because we are called to imitate and obey and proclaim this Truth to all who worship unknown gods. The Truth *is* out there, for young people and for us.

May you find grace to peruse the "X-Files" of your own life in the days ahead, as we grope for "X" together. Though, indeed, he is not far from each of us.

Godspeed,



Kenda Creasy Dean

Director of the Institute for Youth Ministry and Assistant Professor of Youth, Church, and Culture

Communities of Faith for Citizens of a Postmodern World

Nancy T. Ammerman

Issues of cultural change from tradition to modernity to postmodernity can seem rather remote to those of us who are just trying to live our everyday lives. While we may see signs and evidence of those large trends, they often seem to be "out there." What do these trends mean for local congregations?

First, culture is not just something "out there." It is also the very fabric of the everyday lives in which children, youth, and adults are immersed and which they bring with them into the congregation. It is in the language they speak, the schools they go to, the music they hear, and the expectations they have about who does what. It is the primary material out of which a congregation's culture is built. Changes large and small in the culture "out there" inevitably find their way inside the life of the congregation.

Indeed, if we are to understand the realities faced by congregations, there are two cultural facts — products of the modern world and unlikely to change significantly in the postmodern era — that we must put on the table. Those twin facts are mobility and choice. People don't stay in one place for a lifetime, and they think of religion as something to be chosen. Those facts are sometimes so taken for granted that we forget the degree to which they are new in human history. Most people, in most places and times, have had few choices either about where they lived or what religion they claimed. Religion was "ascribed" and lifelong. One might be more or less enthusiastic, more or less observant, but one simply belonged, by virtue of birth.

The United States is the world's foremost experiment in doing things differently. From very early on, European settlers here began to experiment with voluntary religion. By the 1830s, the last of the established churches disappeared, and today even Catholicism, Judaism, Islam, and other immigrant groups have taken on

the voluntary, congregational forms of American Protestantism.[1] Some point to this voluntarism as the key to understanding religion's current woes. Organized religion suffers, these commentators lament, because too many people are doing too much choosing, moving in and out of religious affiliation and from one group to another, seemingly willy-nilly.[2] One person described this as serial promiscuous membership. On the opposite side of the fence, others argue that it is precisely this ability to choose that has kept religious organizations so remarkably healthy in this country, especially as compared to similar bodies in Europe. It has made them responsive to the demands of consumers, created space for innovation, and weeded out the organizational deadwood.[3]

Whichever side of that debate we choose, the fact of voluntarism is here to stay. What is striking, however, is the degree to which many American congregations, especially mainline Protestant ones, act as if that were not the case — as if they can baptize infants and expect them to grow up to be the elders of the church, as if they can enjoy a privileged place in the community that is simply a given, as if it is "tacky" to advertise one's congregation in any way (after all, the elect will find their way without help), as if everyone in the pews knows each other. The facts of mobility and choice change congregational life in some fundamental ways that cannot be ignored.

First, the children we baptize and educate today will take that blessing to a dozen different communities before they are buried. We can assume nothing about the ability of any of those communities to give them the stories of faith or the principles by which to live their lives. If we don't do it today, we can't count on the chance to do it later.

Second, when new people come to our communities, we can't assume that they will come to us either on the basis of proximity or of denominational loyalty. We can't define ourselves by location or denomination and expect that to be enough. They will never know about us if we do not intentionally tell them, and they will want to know why they should join our churches rather than the fifteen others they pass between there and home. Telling people who we are is not crass marketing; it is a fact of life in a mobile society that cannot rely on informal, "natural" means of communication.

Third, congregations that are filled with mobile people have to be constantly reconstructed. All the relationships in them have to be intentionally cultivated rather than built out of the other connections people may have in family and community. When people aren't cousins or neighbors or coworkers, they have to be introduced to each other and to work at creating connections. The growth of small groups as a form of faith community illustrates the degree to which people are willing to invest in such relationship-building. Intimate, face-to-face relationships are not

impossible in a mobile society, but they do have to be intentional.[4]

Fourth, mobility and choice also mean that the communities surrounding congregations are constantly changing. The reality of urban life has always been that neighborhoods constantly evolve from one identity to another with a succession of ethnic groups and land uses. We are finally realizing that this shifting urban ecology means that the ideal of the self-contained, geographical parish is increasingly an anachronism.[5]

Mobility and choice are facts of cultural life that shape everything congregations do, facts that many "established" community churches have sought to ignore for too long. Congregations cannot count on stable communities, stable people, or denominational loyalties to keep their flocks in place. They must recognize their place as constantly reconstructed gatherings. As the lives of their members change, they will change as well. As their immediate communities change, they will adapt or die. In the postmodern world, every congregation must become a "sectarian" gathering, at least insofar as it must be constructed from the intentional decisions of its adult members.

The Contributions Congregations Make

In the work I've done on congregations, I have become increasingly convinced of the essential role they play, and as I think about what postmodernity means, that conviction grows. When we looked at highly stressed, changing communities, yes, we found many congregations in distress as well. But we also found new congregations being born and old congregations expending considerable energy to reorganize or relocate. With the onset of postmodernism, the overall ecology of congregational institutions shifted, often dramatically, but Americans seem not to have given up on gathering into worshiping communities. That is a very good thing. We may be individualists, but our individualism is demonstrated as much in joining up with something as in launching out on our own — something youth ministers surely know from their experience with teens who are constructing new identities.

How and why will congregations survive in a postmodern world, then?[6] First, congregations will survive by recognizing their role as generators of social capital and creators of civic skills. In a time when other forms of social organization may have fallen on hard times, the need to gather is no less critical. People still need points of identification and belonging. In the face of bewildering pluralism, real, locally based affiliations are essential. Community has not disappeared in our postmodern world; it now exists alongside other types of relationships, more anonymous and limited ones. Community now can (indeed, must) be constructed by the persons involved. Voluntary organizations — from choirs to PTAs to ethnic heritage

societies to congregations — continue to be among the places where relationships of trust are formed, where a sense of identity is nurtured.[7] These relationships of trust are what we mean by social capital, and it is this locally generated social capital that makes the larger public conversation ("on the wall" to use Brueggemann's image) possible.

The importance of maintaining points of real belonging in our society suggests that congregations need to pay attention to the ways in which they build community. They need help in nurturing deep interpersonal ties, as well as in celebrating the more superficial — but nonetheless real — rites of group identification. We may snicker at the arcane rituals of the Elks or the Shriners, but those hats and handshakes and songs helped people to know who they were. Congregations may not want to adopt funny hats, but they do need to think about how people know that they are members. Conservative churches often engage in rather intentional efforts to set members apart through distinctive beliefs and practices and by keeping them at arm's length from "the world," but belonging does not require forsaking all others. It does require attention to the activities, rituals, markers, and relationships that enhance a sense of fellowship and communion with one another. The more deeply people belong, the greater the store of social capital that is generated.

In addition to the basic social capital generated in congregations and other voluntary organizations, such groups bear the special responsibility of being the places where otherwise voiceless people have a voice, where those denied leadership in other social arenas learn to lead. So long as inequality persists, there will be a need for congregations that are the special home for people who may have few other safe places of refuge.[8]

Among the many things accomplished within such places is the creation and enhancement of civic skills. If social capital is the basic stuff of organization and connection, civic capital is the repertoire of skills and connections necessary for public life. Beyond association and trust, civic skills involve especially the arts of communication, planning, and decision-making. These are skills often learned in school and on the job, but they are also skills that can be learned through participation in voluntary organizations.[9] Every club that plans a special event, every society that needs officers, and every congregation that asks its members to teach classes and chair committees provides opportunities for the development and exercise of civic skills.

Recent research done by political scientist Sydney Verba and his colleagues confirms that anyone who joins an organization gains in civic skills. People who are relatively disadvantaged in background and job characteristics gain proportionately more. Because people of all economic and educational levels belong nearly equally to congregations (whereas other voluntary organizations are disproportionately middle and upper class), congregations are the single most widespread and egalitar-

ian providers of civic opportunity in the U.S.[10]

Some congregations have a keen sense of their "meeting house" role, hosting community gatherings and political debates. But the research on civic skills suggests that even when congregations are at their most seemingly "private" and "sectarian," they may be facilitating the political process. The same person who learns to write letters to missionaries and to collect money for new hymnals can use those skills to participate in local and national political life. Just ask Pat Robertson. If we wish to strengthen the civic life of our country, we can encourage local congregations, especially those inhabited by disadvantaged people, to offer multiple opportunities for leadership to their members, to be intentional about training them to make presentations and to write letters.

Congregations, then, generate the basic social capital of association, along with the *civic* capital of communication and organizational skills. They do this especially well for those least advantaged in other sectors of the society. They provide the relationships of trust and the currency of belonging that can then be spent in a variety of larger social and civic arenas.

Beyond these basic indirect contributions, congregations also contribute directly to the well-being of their communities. In a time when we are rethinking the relationship between large, centralized forms of social service delivery, congregations are emerging as vital partners in that task, thereby also creating channels for volunteer energy. Not only do congregations and other voluntary organizations provide human resources for the work of sustaining modern social life, they also provide material resources to those efforts. They provide meeting space and transportation, bulletin boards and public address systems, copying machines and paper. The material resources of congregations and other voluntary organizations provide an infrastructure for doing the work of the community, an infrastructure often made most visible in times of crisis.[11] The material infrastructure of gymnasiums, kitchens, telephones, and vans is a critical part of the social capital contributed to the rest of society by voluntary organizations, especially by congregations.

Voluntary organizations often contribute quite directly to the well-being of society by channeling resources and volunteer energies toward arenas of need. Nearly all congregations report providing some sort of human service activities. In many cases this is support given through coalitions rather than directly provided, but the extent to which congregations are involved in the provision of social services is broad indeed.[12] From affordable housing to shelters for abused women, from food pantries to refugee resettlement, congregations are often the organizational vehicles for the ameliorative work that needs to be done in a community. Our culture sees helping the needy as a religious virtue and expects religious organizations to be engaged in service activities.[13]

That cultural expectation also makes congregations likely vehicles for the volunteer energies of those who want to help.[14] Even people who are not members may join in a congregation's tutoring program or help out at the shelter once a week. Even youth who are not sure they believe what their parents want them to believe may still find the congregation's charitable activities worth investing in. Congregations are able to expend social capital in service to the community because they are recognized as legitimate places for investment by people with social capital of their own to spend.

In these sorts of charitable activities, congregations can work in concrete ways at that balance between nurturing their own ties of trust and identity — the way of faith to which they feel called — and risking that way of faith in encounters with others. We have always known that congregations needed to be about a "journey inward" and a "journey outward." In the postmodern situation, neither of those journeys can be taken for granted; both must be intentionally constructed. In a world of mobility and choice, choosing to invest in a congregation is an opportunity both to be formed by that body of faithful people and to participate with them in mobilizing the energies of faith in behalf of the world.

Building up social capital, teaching civic skills, delivering social services, and providing an arena for voluntarism are critical to a postmodern world of fragmentation and mobility, and could be said to be a part of most any voluntary organization. But they are not at the center of what congregations do best. What congregations do best is to provide a space in which the moral and the spiritual are celebrated as essential to human life. In the modern situation, we have relegated such nonrational pursuits to the private (and therefore irrelevant) sphere. In a postmodern world, the moral and the spiritual are leaving their private ghetto. They have come out of the closet and have made their way onto our television screens and into our public debates. If churches do not provide moral insight and spiritual experience, many other purveyors are eager to step into the gap.

More than any other organizations, however, congregations are still expected to represent the community's moral order, to hold up the best human values, while condemning human fault. This is especially evident in their role in the upbringing of children. The tie between congregational membership and family formation is still very strong in U.S. culture.[15] Many adults see religious training for their children as part of their obligation to the world. They would not be doing good or making the world a better place if their children were denied the training provided by the church. While other institutions may participate in the moral upbringing of children, none of them takes on this task quite so explicitly as do religious bodies.

That means that attention to real content in the moral and religious education of children is essential for healthy congregations. It is important that churches

provide a space where kids are expected to be good. But lasting moral education will necessitate more than that. Children do need to practice the virtues, but they also need to learn the stories and rules that underlie those virtues. We need to indulge their mythic and literal impulses, trusting that more metaphoric and relational ways of being faithful will emerge as they mature, but knowing, as well, that the twenty-first century will surely be more friendly to those very myths than was the twentieth.

The concern for inculcating moral standards does not end with children, of course. Congregations also need to encourage their adult members to live by the principles of the faith. In the twenty-three congregations we studied, many of the adults we interviewed talked about the difficulty in sorting out what they ought to be doing. Especially in Bible studies, mission groups, support groups, and the like, we often saw members wrestling with real moral dilemmas.[16] The creation of such small-group, face-to-face settings is essential for the task of moral education, and it is the ideal form of gathering for mobile, choosing postmoderns.

In addition to the intimacy of a small-group setting, the people we interviewed also valued worship each week as a time for reflection and priority setting. Almost no matter what the preacher may have said, the set-aside time, the sacred space of the church, perhaps the inspiration of the music reminded them of what should be most important in their lives. Congregations need to be reminded that it is OK to preach moral prescriptions and to invoke God's presence. Individuals may still adapt those moral prescriptions to their own situations, but if they have no moral guidance and no divine accountability, they are missing much of what they come to church for.

Indeed, one of the reasons for the importance of congregations in this process of moral formation must surely be the linking, in congregations, of moral virtue with sacred presence. Congregations are not just places to be reminded of what one ought to do. They are spaces where "ought" is put in cosmic perspective. While people may encounter transcendent realities in all sorts of places, the spaces and rituals of congregational life invite transcendence. We expect to meet God — at least on occasion — when we go to church. When Don Miller describes what he calls "new paradigm" churches, their most salient feature is that they effectively mediate God's presence.[17] People go there to experience God's healing, comforting, transforming power.

This linking of moral instruction with transcendent presence is often powerfully conservative, convincing people that the world is as it should be. In that sense, congregations are often seen as bastions of status-quo conservatism. Yet such is not always the case. This same sense of transcendence can reveal the world to be "merely" human, susceptible to human intervention.[18] The perspective experienced

in worship and ritual is a perspective that makes critique and action possible. Whether candlelight vigils in East Germany or the strains of "We shall overcome" or the sight of a sinner repenting at the altar, it is clear that the gestures, sights, and sounds of religious ritual are experienced as powerful by the participants. What happens in congregations is different from what happens in other social gatherings because they are religious, transcendent experiences, and ideas about God are central to the values congregations protect and disseminate among their members.

Congregations that are strong, then, will nurture this sense of transcendence. They will be intentional about invoking God's presence and envisioning a world that looks more like God's reign than this one now does. They will reclaim eschatology and hope as vital parts of a living theology. Vital congregations will be more than efficient organizations, more even than strong contributors to the civic order. They will be places where this world is placed in moral and spiritual perspective and where the spiritual energy for change is generated.

As the doors of the postmodern world crack open to allow faith and everyday life into conversation with each other, we must find ways to nurture those exchanges. And as the doors of the postmodern world swing back and forth between strong local communities and open arenas in which the common good is sought, we need churches that are neither afraid of their own particularity nor afraid to engage the other. In a postmodern world where everyone must choose a way of being religious, the tasks of building and nurturing those particular, local communities of faith can never be taken for granted. Growing up postmodern means that our children will be ever more dependent on the willingness of mobile adults to choose to create communities in which the stories of the faith can be told, the mysteries of God's presence celebrated, and the love of God made real.

NOTES

1. R. Stephen Warner, "The Place of the Congregation in the Contemporary American Religious Configuration," in *American Congregations: New Perspectives in the Study of Congregations*, ed. James Wind and James Lewis (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), pp. 54-99.

2. Penny Long Marler and David A. Roozen, "From Church Tradition to Consumer Choice: The Gallup Surveys of the Unchurched American," in *Church and Denominational Growth*, ed. David A. Roozen and C. Kirk Hadaway (Nashville: Abingdon, 1993), pp. 253-277.

3. This argument is probably most clearly articulated in Laurence R. Iannaccone, "Why Strict Churches Are Strong," *American Journal of Sociology* 99, no. 5 (March 1994): pp. 1180-1211. Mark Chaves and David E. Cann, "Regulation, Pluralism, and Religious Market Structure: Explaining Religion's Vitality," *Rationality and Society* 4, no. 3 (July 1992): pp. 272-290, offer an important clarification.

4. On small groups, see Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey* (New York: Free Press, 1994). On the nature of community in mobile, urban settings, see Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1978) and Claude S. Fischer, *To Dwell among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

5. Nancy T. Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1997).

6. The following section draws on Nancy T. Ammerman, "Bowling Together: Congregations and the American Civic Order," The Arizona State University Lecture in Religion (February 1996)

7. See, for example, Christopher G. Ellison and Linda K. George, "Religious Involvement, Social Ties, and Social Support in a Southeastern Community," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 33 no. 1 (1994): pp. 46-61.

8. Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26: pp. 56-80. This is not to ignore the fact that such counterpublics can silence their own dissenters as easily as they themselves are silenced by the larger society.

9. Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation," *American Political Science Review* 89 no. 2 (June 1995): pp. 271-294.

10. Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

11. John B. Orr, Donald E. Miller, Wade Clark Roof, and J. Gordon Melton, *Politics of the Spirit: Religion and Multiethnicity in Los Angeles* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1994): p. 16.

12. Virginia A. Hodgkinson and Murray S. Weitzman, *From Belief to Commitment: The Community Service Activities and Finances of Religious Congregations in the United States:* 1993 Edition (Washington: Independent Sector, 1993) pp. 19-20.

13. Robert Wuthnow, *God and Mammon in America* (New York: Free Press, 1994).

14. Ibid., pp. 242-243.

15. Nancy T. Ammerman and Wade Clark Roof, eds. *Work, Family, and Religion in Contemporary Society* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

16. These themes of everyday faith are explored in Nancy T. Ammerman, "Golden Rule Christianity: Lived Religion in the American Mainstream," in *Lived Religion in America,* ed. David Hall (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), pp. 196-216.

17. Donald E. Miller, *Reinventing American Protestantism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

18. Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1969) pp. 95-96.

Just What Is Postmodernity and What Difference Does It Make to People of Faith?

Nancy T. Ammerman

The theme "Growing Up Postmodern" provides an excellent starting place to move us toward putting youth ministry within a broader view of the culture in which that ministry takes place. "Postmodern" is a vague and often contested term that requires definition. To see what "post" modernity might mean, we really have to remind ourselves of how the modern world can be contrasted with the traditional world that came before it. We need to remind ourselves of the ways in which the modern world in which most of us are comfortable posed its own serious challenges to the faith of earlier generations.

Back when my daughter was considerably younger than she is now, one of her favorite Faerie Tale Theater videos was *The Princess and the Pea.* If you remember, the princess has to prove her worth by feeling a pea under her mattress. At one point the princess, played in this version by Liza Minelli, chides the prince, who seems to be stuck in quite a rut. "But Rupert," she says, "This is the sixteenth century!" It is a line that has surely been heard thousands of times since — with appropriate variations. For at least the last several centuries, those of us living in the western world have perceived ourselves to be living in "modern" times. Things were changing, after all. Tradition was old hat, and ideas that our parents had about the way things were supposed to be just would not do. What our parents saw as mysterious, we were sure we could explain. Ways of life they saw as alien, strange, and probably dangerous we were eager to experiment with. And things they assumed they could do for themselves at home, we were constantly taking to "experts" to fix. In the process, each generation of parents has been quite sure that these offspring of theirs have lost their faith.

And now here we are at the end of the 1990s, anticipating the turn of another century, and that modernizing process is still going on. In some places "tradition" has

been gone for a long time, while in others it is still very much alive. Tradition seems to thrive best in places that are relatively small, relatively remote from others, where outside influences and population growth do not push the community along toward change. There are still plenty of places like that around the world. In such places, alien ways may remain alien, experts are not needed, and mysteries may remain. Faith in God and faith in the predictability of life in those communities seem to go hand in hand.

But not so for most of us or for the youth who watch MTV and surf in cyberspace. We have left that traditional world long behind and are trying to anticipate what it may be like to have our children say to us, "But Mom, this is the twenty-first century!"

And just as being a person of faith has changed with each generation, it will change again in the decades ahead. What might some of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead be? First, three challenges along with the responses devised by the modern era. Then, the opportunities that may be present in the postmodern world.

The Challenges of Modernity

The first challenge that came with modernity is the challenge of continually disappearing mysteries.[1] From the earliest times, people seem to have turned to their religions to explain the unexplainable in life: Where do babies come from? Why does the moon pass through phases? What makes the crops grow and the rains come? What happens to us when we die? In the earliest days, priests and shamans offered solutions and cures, rituals and explanations for things people had no other way of understanding.

But beginning with the Enlightenment and modern science, priests lost their place as dispensers of approved knowledge about life's mysteries. If we want to know why we are sick, we go to a doctor. If we want to know about the moon, we ask an astronomer or even an astronaut. But more important than even this narrowing of the range of things people take to priests for explanation has been the shift in the *way* we expect knowledge to be obtained. What we learned in school and from the leaders in our culture was that knowledge is not *revealed,* or *handed down* to us, but *discovered* through careful scientific procedures. And we expect to be able to apply those methods to anything.[2] Give us a problem and we will tackle it; *nothing is sacred.* As we look toward the century ahead, we have no reason to believe that the probing light of rational science will not be directed at more of the world we live in, even areas once thought sacred. We have no reason to believe that we will not continue to be challenged to justify whatever faith remains in terms that can be understood by others who expect the world to be rational and explainable,

not mysterious and subject to magical manipulation.

But science and rationality are not the only things that have characterized the modern period in western civilization. As our base of knowledge has expanded and as the size of our communities has grown, we have moved more and more to "specialization" — to dividing up the tasks that once went together under one roof.[3] The second challenge facing people of faith is the continuing separation of religious concerns into a specialized compartment in the world.

We recognize specialization most easily when we talk about the kind of medicine we see practiced or what happens in business, but we do not often think about the fact that not long ago "business" or "medicine" did not exist as separate specialties. Business was what one did when one needed to trade crops for tools, and medicine was what one practiced with the remedies kept in a corner of the kitchen. Today, whatever specialized expert we need can be found in the Yellow Pages, and no single expert is expected to know very much about any other expert's business. And religion has certainly not been immune. A very long time ago, we began to see the benefit in limiting the power of religious institutions in public life, especially removing religions from their ability to command armies. But that has tended to leave religion solely as the shaper of private religious individuals, acting in the leisure or family sphere of their lives.[4]

The result of all of this specialization, then, is that *each person* comes to occupy a number of domains, and the job of understanding the meaning of life rests squarely on each individual's shoulders, not on the culture at large.

The third challenge for faith in the modern era is the challenge of pluralism. Throughout much of human history, ways of being religious and membership in a group were coterminous. One might be more or less religious, more or less observant of the rituals, but to differ in any fundamental way from the cosmology or morality of the community was very unlikely. Today there are fewer and fewer places where such consensus exists. Most of us live in the midst of real differences. People believe in different gods or no god at all; they worship on Saturday and Sunday and five times a day. Some give up things for Lent, and others fast between sunup and sundown during Ramadan. Some ordain women, and others cover the bodies of women from the forehead to the toes. How is a person to know what *is* right? Even if we choose to adopt the ways of our childhood, we know only too well that those others are also adopting the ways of *their* childhoods — and whose childhood counts after all?[5]

The usual way we moderns have dealt with this dilemma is through "civility," granting at least a minimal presumed legitimacy to strangers and agreeing to carry on our public debates without bloodshed. Those are very important social skills, and civility is a very important political concept. As a social skill, it enables us to get

along with strangers. As a political principle, it keeps us from excluding strangers from participation in our *political* processes. But "civility" has made being religious very difficult. It has reduced us to talking about our "personal" religious beliefs and encouraging everyone to attend the "church or synagogue of his or her choice."[6] It has made proselytizing seem impolite.

Being a person of faith in the decades ahead, then, means that we will continue to face the challenges of continually disappearing mysteries, of compartmentalization, and of pluralism. Ours remains a modern world that depends on reason more than on mystery, that looks for ever more specialized experts whose domains are kept quite separate from the concerns of faith, and a world in which an increasingly diverse population makes any given way of life seem like merely a matter of personal choice.

Postmodern Opportunities

These are very real challenges that are themselves being challenged. Modernity is reaching its limits. So what does a postmodern era mean for people of faith? Whatever we mean by postmodern will surely not discard everything that the modern world has stood for. Rather, a new era is emerging that is building on modernity's gains and is beginning to transcend some of its limits.

What, then, about the modern world's preoccupation with rationality? Surely we are not about to abandon reason in favor of tradition, science in favor of magic. Probably not. However, we are beginning to see the limits of rationality. Perhaps they have been most visible to us since the holocausts of systematic Jewish annihilation and of atomic warfare. Or perhaps it was Rachel Carson and the growing awareness of the limits of our planet. We have seen what science *can* do. We have seen that the power is now in human hands to uncreate the world. And we know that somehow the only power that can counter the awesome, explainable power of nuclear destruction and ecological disaster is the awesome, unexplainable power of a human spirit that is redeemed and sustained by a greater Power from above. We are beginning to glimpse a future where mystery may be as important to our survival as we have believed rational explanation to be until now.

We are also recognizing that we have always depended on other ways of knowing, alongside our reasoned inquiry. We have always trusted tradition more than we ever admitted. Vast areas of our lives are still governed by rules that come to us through habit and advice and that have never been tested in any scientist's laboratory. We also know that sometimes our knowledge and insight come from sources we have a hard time explaining. Sometimes we call it a "gut feeling" or an "intuition" or a "healing" or a "vision." Sometimes all the pieces of something simply come together into a whole that is more than the sum of its parts. Sometimes some bit

of wisdom from an earlier time suddenly makes sense of our current situation. Sometimes we see the beauty of something in ways we can't even really put into words. And for countless people around the world, knowledge is as likely to be sought from fortunetellers, astrology columns, and divination specialists as from government-certified experts. We have simply never been as supposedly "rational" as we like to think. We know that truth, understanding, and insight come to us from many sources — not just from scientists who have verified that truth as "safe and effective."

It is worth noting here that these sources of knowledge — art, wisdom, intuition, body, and spirit — are much more likely to be found among and practiced by people who have been outside the dominant culture of the modern, western world. These are sources of knowledge more likely to be found among women than among men, among peoples of color than among Euro-Americans, in the "Third World" more than in the "First." The claim that the modern world is characterized by rationality is primarily a claim about the world constructed, inhabited, and ruled by a small minority of the world's population.[7] As we see the limits of that rational world, the best place to look for alternatives is to the margins, to the people who have never fully been incorporated. It is here that we will find people attuned to a Spirit the modern world thought it had domesticated.

And indeed, today there are voices of protest on every side. There are rising Third World liberation theologies, there are feminists and womanists. All around, the silenced voices are speaking. To some it sounds like chaos, but to others it sounds like Pentecost. The Spirit has at last been unleashed, and all are hearing in their own tongues. A world that had no room for knowledge gained by faith is groping its way forward toward some new ways of knowing. Science is not about to disappear, but its claims have been humbled. At this critical moment, voices of faith dare not be silent. Rather than being preoccupied with making ourselves, our faith, and our Scriptures acceptable to a modern rationalist world — that is now under challenge — this is the time to speak forthrightly of the ways of the Spirit, of the knowledge that comes by faith.

Not only are we seeing the limits of old forms of knowledge, we are also seeing the limits of our drive toward specialization. The very awkwardness of all these hats we wear may tell us that such compartmentalization may have reached its limits. One of the great insights of the women's movement, it seems to me, is that human beings do not thrive on such calculated separation of one part of their lives from another. While we cannot soon expect to see the modern, western world giving up its propensity to create specialists, we may begin to see people experimenting with ways to put their lives back together again, to find a wholeness that makes room for faith in more than one of life's compartments. It will not be a wholeness

that looks like the undifferentiated world of small towns and truly traditional families. It will not be premodern, but postmodern.[8]

We are getting some hints of what that might look like from complex business organizations. Among the many things going on in business today is a massive copying from the Japanese of patterns of work, patterns that bring workers together into a "quality circle" of shared tasks and joint decision-making. Rather than each person doing one small piece of the whole, people work together to see how best to get the job done. This pattern has been made even more prevalent with the growth of high-tech knowledge industries.

Beyond what goes on inside factories, we are also seeing a massive shifting of work from large factories to small "out-sources," from fixed shifts to flexible work schedules, and from fixed offices to telecommuting and work at home.[9] The very pressure of vast numbers of two-job families has forced all of us to recognize a need for new arrangements between work and family. We have certainly not arrived in any sort of utopia, but we are beginning to put our lives together in slightly different ways.

And all of that means that the neat lines between each of those spheres of activity are giving way ever so slightly. For nearly two centuries, we have thought that emotion, caring, and faith belonged in a "private" sphere of home and church, while reason, competition, and the market define "public" space. Women belong in the first, of course, and men in the second. But just as gender barriers are breaking down, so are the barriers that define what concerns belong where.[10]

One of the most eloquent statements of that argument is found in Steven Carter's recent book *Culture of Disbelief*.[11] He shows in minute detail the ways in which our culture "trivializes" religion by making it a private, personal, even leisure, activity. Our culture expects us to keep religion out of our public policy debates, out of the courtroom, out of the classroom. But, Carter argues, bringing one's faith into those public places does not necessitate an intolerant, theocratic perspective. To say that I favor feeding the hungry because I am commanded to do so by Christ is just as valid a position in the public policy debate as to say that I oppose feeding the hungry because my statistical model tells me it is not cost effective. The problem is not where our opinions come from — faith versus reason — but how we engage in the debate. There can be ample room for faith perspectives around the table. George Marsden's book *The Soul of the American University* makes a similar point about what happens in academic life.[12] What is remarkable about these two books is that they have been received with such public discussion and fanfare. As much as both books lament the constraints of the modern situation, both also herald the end of that era and propose new ways of living our public lives together. As the bits and pieces of a segmented life are being put back together, we have a win-

dow of opportunity. In these days of emerging change, we can reclaim for religion some of the territory ceded to the modern world in days gone by.

The thought of bringing faith perspectives into public debate raises, of course, the third challenge of the modern world — pluralism. What *are* we to do with all those different voices around the table? Doesn't the reality of pluralism demand that we find a universal, civil, secular language we can all share in the public arena? Don't we have to keep our various particularities to ourselves? This is certainly not an easy question to answer. The horrors of Bosnia, Rwanda, and South Central Los Angeles are reminder enough that people take their particular local, ethnic, and religious identities very seriously; and we desperately need ways to live together in peace. Yet each of those tragic situations could just as easily be interpreted as the result of a misguided universalism as to see it as the result of particularity gone mad. For much too long, national governments have tried to pretend that the ethnics were "meltable," that everyone would eventually recognize the nation-state as his or her primary point of loyalty, that the nation's language would be the universal form of discourse.

It seems to me that *either* repressive universalism or separatist particularity can be a problem, and that the same problem plagues religion. People of faith have acted as if the only two options were either an intolerant fundamentalism that claimed a truth so narrow as to be useless or a wishy-washy liberalism that claimed a truth so broad as to be meaningless. As we stumble toward a postmodern world, however, new strategies seem to be emerging.

The work of Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann is helpful in thinking about this problem. In a provocative article with a difficult title, "On the Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic," he recounts the story of one of Israel's encounters with the Assyrians.[13] They are surrounded, and the enemy commanders meet Israel's commanders on the wall of the city. They begin to speak to the Israelites, in Hebrew, demanding surrender and setting out the terms. The Israelites, however, refuse to carry on the negotiations in Hebrew, insisting that their language be reserved for their own particular uses. They also insist that they be allowed to retreat behind the wall for a community consultation. There, behind the wall, they speak Hebrew, the language in which the story of God's actions in the world can be told. There they spend time coming to terms with what has happened to them and with how it fits into God's story. Only then do they return to negotiate, in Assyrian, having clarified, in their own language, what their position must be.

Brueggemann uses this story to argue for the need to be bilingual. We need both the language behind the wall and the language on the wall — both our own particular language, in which God's name is spoken, and the language of the realm, in which deals are negotiated. The modern world told us to forget the language

behind the wall. If everyone just learned the language of the realm, we would be fine. But what we have learned is the extent to which we need those special, local, particular places, those people whose accents we recognize, those stories that remind us of who we are. In the quest to be intelligible to everyone, we have discovered we have nothing to say.

As Brueggemann points out, there are dangers at both extremes. Our world is much too small for all of us to live exclusively behind the wall. We bump into too many strangers to make speaking only one language practical. We know we have to develop ways to talk to each other and manners that allow us to talk to each other "on the wall." But at the same time, to live only on the wall is not to have a home. To speak only the universal language is to miss the stories that form us. To the conservatives, he might say, "Come out of your enclaves occasionally; learn that the rest of the world isn't as fearsomely evil as you imagine from in there." To the liberals, he might say, "Go home; listen to the stories, relearn the language, find out who you are, and come back to the wall a much more interesting person."

The task of finding a balance between our need for rootedness and our need to get along in a pluralistic world is a task still painfully incomplete; yet, it is another of the tasks of an emerging postmodern world to which people of faith are invited. We are invited to reclaim the distinctiveness of our tradition, to let it thoroughly shape us; at the same time, we are invited to an increasingly crowded global village square.

What it means to be postmodern is yet emerging. We probably know more about the ways in which we have reached the limits of modernity than we know about the exact shape of the postmodern world that lies ahead. But this is a critical time for us as people of faith. The dilemmas we have faced as modern people are all being reframed. The either-or answers we thought we had to choose are proving to be irrelevant, and we are being challenged to help formulate new ways of living. We are invited to help the world figure out how to take spirit and body seriously, alongside the wisdom of the mind. We are invited to help the world figure out how to reknit "private" and "public" concerns. And we are invited to help the world find a new way to balance difference with common concern. More to the point, this postmodern world is the world in which our children will live, and if we are to walk with them into the future, these are the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

NOTES

1. This lecture draws on a synthesis I have presented in a number of forms. It especially includes material prepared in written form for "Conservative Jews within the Landscape of American Religion," in *The Jews in the Pews: Conservative Synagogues and Their Members*, ed. Jack Wertheimer (1998).

2. Among the many social theorists who have written about this move toward rational, scientific authority is Max Weber, in *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: Free Press, 1947). On the presumed conflict between science and religion, see especially Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science, and Religion* (New York: Free Press, 1948 [1925]). The eventual demise of religion is the underlying narrative line in the historical accounts given by Freud about the human psyche, and by Marx and Weber of human history.

3. This division of labor is at the heart of the modernizing process, as Durkheim saw it. See Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: Free Press, 1984 [1893]).

4. This same process of specialization has separated "church" from "state," thereby both limiting the power of the church to use coercion and enabling the church to act as an independent critical voice on public issues. On this see José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994). This separation of powers is, at heart, what is meant by secularization, but, as Casanova argues, separation need not mean loss of influence. See also Nancy T. Ammerman, "Review of 'A Bridging of Faiths'" by N. J. Demerath and Rhys H. Williams, in *Society* 31, no. 1 (November/December 1993: pp. 91-93) on the "cultural power" of religion.

5. On the challenges of pluralism to the "plausibility structure" of religious faith, see especially Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1969) and Peter L. Berger, "From the Crisis of Religion to the Crisis of Secularity," in *Religion and America*, ed. Mary Douglas and Steven Tipton (Boston: Beacon Press, 1982), pp. 14-24.

6. Among the theorists who have made the links between modernity and individuality, see Rose Laub Coser, *In Defense of Modernity: Role Complexity and Individual Autonomy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991); Georg Simmel, "Group Expansion and the Development of Individuality," in *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, ed. Donald N. Levine (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971 [1908]). Among those who have argued that modern religion is characterized by individualism, see Phillip E. Hammond, *Religion and Personal Autonomy: The Third Disestablishment in America* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); Robert N. Bellah, "Religious Evolution," in *Beyond Belief* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963); Thomas Luckmann, *The Invisible Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1967); Talcott Parsons, "Religion and Modern Industrial Society," in *Religion, Culture, and Society*, ed. Louis Schneider, pp. 273-98; and Robert N. Bellah, et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). Interesting studies of recent generations of religious individualists include Wade Clark Roof, *A Generation of Seekers* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1993); and Dean R. Hoge, Benton Johnson, and Donald A. Luidens, *Vanishing Boundaries: The Religion of Mainline Protestant Baby Boomers* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), especially chapter 3.

7. The advantages of paying attention to the margins of the dominant, western world are highlighted by, among others, feminist and womanist sociologists such as Karen McCarthy Brown, *Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991); Patricia Hill Collins, "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," *Social Problems* 33, 1985: pp. 514-532; and Victoria Lee Erickson, *Where Silence Speaks: Feminism, Social Theory, and Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993). This is a theme I elaborate in "Telling Congregational Stories," *Review of Religious Research* 36, no. 1 (June 1994).

8. People who choose to commit themselves to a community have been called by Stephen Warner "elective parochials." He describes this phenomenon in *New Wine in Old Wineskins* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

9. On postmodern organizational trends, see Stewart Clegg, *Modern Organizations: Organizational Studies in the Postmodern World* (London: Sage, 1990).

10. In addition to arguments for the integration of work and family life in more humane patterns, feminist theorists have argued for the blurring of lines between "public" and "private" as a way of breaking down neat gender barriers. On the insufficiency of defining the "public" as universal, see Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25/26, 1990: pp. 56-80.

11. Stephen L. Carter, *The Culture of Disbelief* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).

12. George M. Marsden, *The Soul of the American University* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

13. Walter Brueggemann, "The Legitimacy of a Sectarian Hermeneutic: 2 Kings 18-19," in *Education for Citizenship and Discipleship*, ed. Mary C. Boys (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), pp. 3-34.

"Who Is Jesus Christ for Us Today?" As Asked by Young People

Martin E. Marty

...yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist... (I Corinthians 8:5-6)

Dietrich Bonhoeffer saw the worst of modernity in the mad rationality of Hitler's Germany. The so-called gods of Teutonic mythology and the modern lords of military-mounted totalitarianism claimed the total loyalty of the people and demonized "the Other" — the Jew, the homosexual, the dissident. Imprisoned and ultimately to be killed by the Nazis a month before World War II ended, this still young theologian, pastor, confirmation teacher (who "had a way with the young people") had time to muse.

He wrote poetry on the theme "Who am I?" But he also had to ask, in that secular "world come of age" that he saw around him and in the religious varieties he met in prison, a question that had haunted him for years: "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?"

Young people today ask that same question, though not in the face of executioners and imprisoners. They may not pose the "Jesus Christ" question as startlingly as Bonhoeffer did, and his confirmands in the Germany of the 1930s did not recognize its force as he did. They had lives to live, radios to listen to, comic books to read, parents against whom to rebel, and Hitler Youth Movements to respond to or, at some hazard, to reject. Theirs had been a high humanist tradition. Jesus Christ was privileged by tradition, but they could take him for granted in the back-at-home piety or when the Führer preached about Christ. Yes, Bonhoeffer was posing that question out of their circumstances and for their good. He did not say Christ "for me" but Christ "for *us*," as we must.

The standard theme in books written on Jesus and on Christology in the post-modern era seems to be that we are not going to agree on Jesus Christ "for us" and

all that phrase implies. The authors present *their* Jesus, *their* Christ, and they tell how they came to scholarly conclusions about him. Many of their books are historically and literarily refined and helpful along the way.

Most of them know that in premodern eras, from the early church until a couple of centuries ago, who Jesus Christ was was determined pretty much by credal and confessional formulation. Dogma, doctrine, the magisterium, systematic theology, and biblical scholarship spoke. Acquiescent laity received the message, perhaps dimly, through preaching and catechesis. But what they did not know, they could find out by asking. Not that ancient creeds and statements like the one from the Council of Chalcedon (451 A.D.) were simple to comprehend. They dealt with realities about the divine and the human that resist clear definition and cannot be definitively grasped. Yet, these creeds could speak with some precision.

After they spoke, there was authority to enforce what was heard. In the sixteenth century a would-be Unitarian physician named Servetus questioned the divinity of Jesus. John Calvin stood by, as virtually any of the main Reformers would have, while Servetus, a heretic, was executed.

Of course, an understanding of who Jesus was came not only through dogma and authority. We should never underestimate the values and virtues of preaching and prayer, baptism and communion, and piety and instruction that pass from one generation to another. The existence of the Christian church, one or two billion strong, shows that something went on that helped people answer "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" If anything written here seems to be denigrating them or the legacy they left, such demeaning was not intended. Once again, we are not speaking about whether different times were better or worse, but only saying that they were different.

The postmodern young can live much of their lives without having Jesus stand in their way at all. Public education, television, radio, film, CDs, and other instruments of culture tend to be silent about Jesus. For churchgoers and participants in Christian education and youth ministry, there is more. But otherwise, the signals about who Christ is are blocked or ignored. The church seeks to change that.

The last thing that we would expect of the young is that they achieve what the scholars have not done: to sort out all the signals to come up with a definitive and universal answer to the question. Statistics reveal that the market for serious theology numbers about 12,000 people in our culture of 270,000,000. This means that most clergy are not troubling themselves with formal answers to the formal questions as posed by formal scholars. Nor should we expect precision in the answers the young semiheretics might come up with, especially in a postmodern time when few know how to define heresy, and the smart ones know how to avoid heresy trials.

Winston Churchill used to tell the story of a man who risked his life to save a drowning boy. He rescued him and, gasping for breath as he turned the boy over to his mother, heard her snap: "Where's Johnny's cap?" "Where's Johnny's cap?" here would mean: you got the young to take seriously the question of Jesus Christ, but neither you nor they settled once and for all how the divine and human meet in Jesus, how Jesus "fits in" to the Trinity. How God "the Father" as God and Jesus Christ as "the Lord" can be kept before us without our falling into ditheism, two-god worship. We are content to have Johnny alive, ready to swim again, or to learn how to, even if capless.

So what question should we ask? The one this forum asked has to do with one decisive element: "Growing Up Postmodern" as it relates to "Imitating Christ in the Age of 'Whatever.'" Few will stay with the quest and the response if they do not come to see Jesus as not merely an extraordinary ordinary human. It is not likely that many will imitate him instead of some other hero or heroine if they do not have some experience of him as savior, redeemer, and healer. But that is for another day. Our topic has to do with imitation and discipleship.

Choosing to follow or, in some languages, recognizing that one was chosen to follow is not an isolated act by eccentrics in a culture that does not recognize what they are doing. It is one thing to imitate Christ in Albania or Manchuria or Tibet and another to do so in Albany or Manchester or Toronto. In the United States, the late modern and postmodern conjunctions have plenty of room for Jesus Christ to emerge, when one bothers to ask or to notice.

"Who is Jesus Christ for the American people today?" In late modern America, the way to find that out is to take a poll. A dozen years ago the Princeton Religion Research Center, the Gallup poll, undertook such a survey. Its findings are published in *Who Do Americans Say That I Am?* (Westminster Press, 1986). The survey has all the limits such inquiries do, as admitted by George Gallup Jr., coauthor with George O'Connell. It is hard to refine questions appropriate to such an inquiry, and one may (and must) regard some responses with some suspicion. Yet, certain bold outlines stand out. The young enter postmodernity in the midst of a public where among the so-called gods Jesus remains a cherished and privileged subject for worship, devotion, and following.

It is tempting to go into great detail in reporting on such a survey, but sampling is in order here. We find that 91 percent believe that Christ lived, and that 70 percent say something like "Christ was God." (Paul says that only once, in Romans 9; but we'll let that pass.) He was "just a religious leader" to only 11 percent. A few responded either "don't know" or "Christ didn't live," but he is still the figure for most to confront. Among those who do not believe that Jesus is divine, 20 percent wish they could believe, 36 percent have no opinion, and 44 percent don't think it

would make a great deal of difference.

Forty-two percent were ready to say that "Jesus was divine in the sense that he was in fact God living among men," and 275 said he was "divine in the sense that while he was only a man, he was uniquely called by God to reveal God's purpose in the world." About 17 percent had lesser descriptions of divinity in him, and 14 percent had no opinion. But in the age of "whatever," Jesus is still clearly the "Whomever" with whom to reckon on the divine/human frontier.

How important to you is belief that Christ was "fully God and fully human?" Fifty-eight percent of the general public said it was "very important," and 23 percent said it was "fairly important." Gallup did not ask the very young, but 53 percent of the eighteen to twenty-nine year olds and 55 percent of the thirty to forty-nine year olds said "very important," and, successively, 27 percent and 25 percent of those two age cohorts said it was "fairly important." Add "not very important" and "not important" and you get 17 percent of the public and 18 percent of the eighteen to twenty-nine year olds. So "Whoever" Christ is is important in the "whatever" era — as it became to those to whom Paul and his contemporaries addressed the question for the very first time in their cultures.

Do you consider yourself to be a Christian? Here again, following Jesus, which is part of being a Christian, is a privileged role. In the general public, 81 percent named themselves after him, 785 of the eighteen to twenty-four year olds called themselves Christian.

What is important among the ways to try to follow Jesus? Forty-eight percent said "obeying the Ten Commandments," 44 percent replied "forgiving those who have wronged you"; 34 percent "putting others' needs before your own"; and 31 percent "living in such a way as to draw others to Jesus." There were eleven other answers to this question. The fewest, 10 percent, thought that following Jesus meant "working for social justice," or "becoming involved in community activities," and next was 14 percent, who said "receiving Holy Communion." Not all the implications of imitating Christ have been worked out in such a sample.

For the "imitating Christ" questions we have this: *How hard have you tried to follow the example of Jesus — if at all?* In the general public 12 percent said they had made the "greatest possible" effort; 33 percent said they had made "considerable" effort; 34 percent said "some." The figures for eighteen to twenty-four year olds in the three categories were 4 percent, 28 percent, and 44 percent. It is quite possible that such an answer would have been given by postadolescents at any time; it may also be due to cultural changes and some recession of the Jesus figure or the notion of following anybody. Thus, among those sixty-five and older, the figures are 28 percent, 36 percent, and 23 percent.

This forum is not dedicated chiefly to intellectual inquiries about what is

known by a postmodern public about Jesus, though that question relates to the others. So, we will give only passing notice to three questions: *Who delivered the Sermon on the Mount?* (42 percent knew it was Jesus, 24 percent gave a wrong answer, and 34 percent wisely owned up to the fact that they did not know); *Can you name the four Gospels?* (46 percent could, 43 percent "don't know"); and *Where was Jesus born?* The carols in the postmodern mall must have done their work: 70 percent knew that the answer was Bethlehem. Since cognition and imitation have a lot to do with each other, youth ministry will continue to pay attention to knowledge issues. But our prime concern has to do with imitating this "one Lord" among the many lords, with discipleship and following him as the one "through whom are all things and through whom we exist." That Pauline line has something to do with what it means for the 81 percent to say they are Christian.

Who is Jesus Christ for us today? If one had asked that question among the people of Corinth or Rome when Paul was writing, the answer might have been not 81 percent but .81 percent or .081 percent. What the respondents in the two eras would have had in common, as they would not have in premodern, western worlds, or in their segment apart in denominationalized modern times, is this: who Jesus Christ as Lord was had to be determined among many altars and shrines, many banners and advertisements, many pitches and preachments, among the so-called gods and the many gods and lords.

How refined must their understanding of Jesus as "divine and human" be for young people in postmodern times in order for them to take a decisive turn and see him as the "one Lord" to follow?

They will get many signals. Magazines and newspapers have a fascination for "the new quest for the historical Jesus," "the Jesus Seminar," and other critical inquiries. These leave little intact about Jesus as Lord. What is interesting is that, during the half century of well-publicized, scientific, scholarly scrutinies, the number of people who, no doubt aware of the scholarly contentions that bracket out the divine, keep seeing Jesus as divine remains about as high as ever.

Paul Ricoeur once wrote that there were three ways to approach scriptural texts. One is historical, as the ones just referred to are. We can never know too much about the background of a text. The second, currently in vogue, is literary. The postmoderns "deconstruct" texts and tell us that there are no stable references behind words and lines. But it is the third approach that, alongside or in spite of the other two, reaches the people to whom Jesus is preached and taught. In Ricoeur's words, this is "the world in front of the text." How am I beckoned to entertain a different mode of existence in the light of what I hear when it is read to reach my mind and heart?

How much precision must there be in defining exactly what is at issue in Jesus?

James D.G. Dunn in *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament* (Westminster Press, 1977) looked at all the ways early Christians confessed the faith, organized their communities, and, most of all, witnessed to Jesus Christ. Dunn relished the variety of answers but felt impelled to seek a "bottom line," a basic memory-impression, a root confession of faith. What is distinctive in all the New Testament formulations? It is (notably italicized) "*the conviction that the historical figure, Jesus the Jew, is now an exalted being* — [that this Jesus is and continues to be the] *agent of God*, supreme over all other claimants to the titles Lord and Son of God."

He adds that it is *Jesus* who is confessed, not his ideas, ideology, faith, or teaching. We talk not of the faith *of* Jesus but of faith *in* Jesus. When young people "imitate," do they not cut through everything to come to this same basic point? Second, and this is good for postmodern witness, it is the *present* status of Jesus that is confessed. Not what he *was*, but what he *is*. So the historical figure of Jesus the human and the post-resurrection exalted figure encounters us here and now. Dunn adds that all this occurs differently in "different, particular situations." No locale of the church came up with the terms of a confession to satisfy. If you would work with postmodern use, listen to what Dunn writes fully in the light of Christian witness:

> The fact is, quite simply, that confessions framed in one context do not remain the same when that context changes. New situations call forth new confessions. A Christianity that ceases to develop new confessional language ceases to confess its faith to the contemporary world.

Dunn speaks to our youth when he adds that we should note the *simplicity* of the confessions and witness. "Jesus is the Christ, Jesus is the Son of God, Jesus is Lord. *It is important that faith can be reduced to such simple assertions and slogans.*" If you can believe that as I, by quoting it favorably, do, you will be able to trace the ancestry of the Christian T-shirt to ancient Corinth.

It is worthwhile illustrating an example of what Dunn leaves as an agenda, as it is one that young people experience or will experience. This is especially the case among those who do not live a sheltered existence, who are surrounded by living examples of pluralism — namely young people important to them (or even not so) who do not believe in Jesus Christ, but who are "religious" or "spiritual" or "good." In Lakeland's text he describes one approach among many by which one believes in, follows, and acknowledges the Lordship of Jesus Christ and then does or does not engage in dialogue, efforts to interpret, or to convert. This is one of the more urgent questions for thoughtful young people who do not want to be wishy-washy, semi-committal, tolerant to the point of indifference, or simply relativist. In other words, not confessors at all.

We have before us the question of imitation. What do we see in the one who

is imitated, the exemplar? In the Middle Ages, the lexicons that set out to define the word from which come example and exemplar spoke of the *exemplum* or "a clearing in the woods." Words like "excerpt" and "excise" are similar examples of "cutting out" or clearing.

The *exemplum*, the clearing in the woods, has three functions. First, it defines the woods. The woods are dark thickets, plotless obscurities. Then comes the clearing where the woods ends and another reality begins. Next, the clearing is the place where the light falls, and one can see clearly. Third, in the clearing there is cultivating — a cabin, some rows of corn, a cow tethered, a clothesline, and smoke coming from a chimney.

If Jesus Christ is an exemplar for a young person in the dark thicket of postmodernity with its plotless obscurities, he becomes the definition for that young person's life. Access to Jesus through the Gospels, the stories, and the neighbor represents light in the dark shadows. Knowing how he "cultivated" allows the young person a chance to grow. The Gallup poll gave some samples of what the late-modern public saw as exemplary: *What do you consider to be the most appealing character or personality trait in Jesus?* Forty-one percent said "love for humankind," and 13 percent said "forgiveness." Then, all less than 10 percent, followed "kindness," "compassion," "help/guidance," "humility," "knowledge/understanding," "caring," "teachings," "promise of salvation," and "everything about him is good." Fewer than 5 percent answered with surprises such as "strength" and "healing," and in the 1 percent and 2 percent range were "ethics," "divinity," "miracles," and "hope." The premodern pictures of Jesus as judge are not present. This may be too "soft" a picture of Jesus, but in a cruel world, starting with the exemplar of love may not be the worst thing to propagate among young people.

Young people show in survey after survey that they want to be "connected." So, what do we do with this information? The Add Health people, reporting in *Reducing the Risk: Connections That Make a Difference in the Lives of Youth,* make connection the main theme of their findings. Youth may look as if they want to be disconnected from community and others; they may seem as if they want to escape into "virtual reality" and media-packaged and mall-related worlds. Yet, decisively, they would rather connect with parents and family, with school, and with friends.

A clue that comes with many versions of Christology but was not prime in premodern or modern discourse is Jesus as friend. This is a seldom-sounded (e.g., John 15:15) but constantly subthemed accent. However, in the very new translation and publication of Rudolf Schnackenburg's *Freundschaft mit Jesus,* now, *The Friend We Have in Jesus* (Westminster/John Knox Press, 1997), the distinguished senior Wuerzburg scholar wrote with some sense of urgency, as he said:

> In sickness and old age, I have striven to keep the feeling and experiential impact of Jesus Christ clearly in view, concerning myself especially with young people who are laboring to construct their own image of Jesus. I ask myself, "How can the figure of Jesus Christ become engaging — even fascinating — for the youth in our midst?"

Too bad he was not healthy enough, young enough, or English-speaking enough to be at this forum. Schnackenburg hurries past three prominent images of Jesus in our postmodern days: "The Revolutionary Jesus," "Jesus of the Essenes," and "Jesus: Crucified but Not Raised to New Life." He finds as many good reasons to dismiss these for youth as youth would. He focuses in his Part Two on "Jesus Our Friend — A Fascinating Portrait."

There are chapters on "The Gift of Friendship," "Friendship according to John and Paul," "Jesus As the Model for Humankind," "The Call for Decision," and "Jesus Our Friend." Those five chapters could provide an outline for a working out of what "imitating" and "exemplum" here might mean.

We who work with young people can begin to see the implications. That the human Jesus who is the exalted Lord, who commends himself to us and for us, today, as a "servant Lord," imparting and embodying what God means for us — that *this* Jesus is identified as a friend to be imitated is a strong clue. It must find some resonance among people who seek friends in a friendless world, who seek understanding in a universe that seems to be indifferent to the cries of the lonely. He does what friends can do. Admonish. Encourage. Give life for another.

Friendship is based on conversation. We tell a story, and our friends enter in. They have inquiries, and we have partial answers, each of which they correct or reframe out of their experience. Friendship is never a finished product. The Jesus who comes through story, proclamation, experience, and embodiment-in-other-friends cannot be captured in dogma books as people in premodern times thought he could be. Of course, the theologian, even the scholastic theologian, can be helpful by systematizing some of the stories and attributes we connect with Jesus. But few of these theologies match the Jesus Christ who, as the exalted human, is "available," is "at our disposal," who "changes" as we change in the postmodern flux of apparent contradictions.

A friend can say, "This time you went too far," or "Why are you so 'down' today?" or "Can I help you?" or "Confide in me," or "What's really bugging you?" or "Teach me." We have sung, in not the best of hymns, "What a friend we have in Jesus."

That image of Jesus as friend is but one of many possible clearings in the woods. It comes, he comes, as a definer, a light-bringer, and a call to cultivation for those who are "growing up postmodern."

Youth between Late Modernity and Postmodernity

Martin E. Marty

Indeed, even though there may be so-called gods in heaven and earth — as in fact there are many gods and many lords — yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom we are all things and through whom we exist.

1 Corinthians 8:6

We will not pay too much attention to the context of this text. Paul is writing to Corinthian believers about a distinct problem: whether the baptized should eat meat sacrificed to "so-called gods." We and our young people have problems enough of our own, and no doubt some of them are similar to those that plagued Corinth. But we shall try to hurry to our modern Corinths.

Why, then, cite the text? First, because it poses a situation common to Christians through all ages. And, with youth in mind, we have to say also Christians *of* all ages. The young are busy making decisions, many of which have to do with what signals they will both receive and accept. Will the lures of their culture, many of which amount to "so-called gods," receive their devotion? Or can and will they continue to be disciples, acknowledging one God, one Lord? In both the cases of God, called by Paul "the Father," and of the Lord, "Jesus Christ," the same holds true: "all things" come from this God and this Lord, and through this God and this Lord we "exist."

The particular time and place that appear to set the stage for the cast of characters here called "youth" are coming to be called "postmodern." This is neither the time nor the place for us to set the world straight about whether there is such a thing as postmodernity. Neither is it the occasion for us to contribute to debates over literary and historical theory. University departments, libraries, and salons are full of discourse — itself a postmodern activity — about postmodernity.

Our task is to fill the concept of postmodernity with enough substance so that we can address the question of Christian faith and discipleship among today's young. Thus, we shall describe only enough of what gets called postmodernity to advance the Christian question.

The young are pioneers living on the frontier between what gets called "late modernity" and early "postmodernity." Those who observe them and who participate in their perceiving and deciding have reason to note two ironies.

First, many of those who whine about the present scene, a scene that credibly occasions whining as well as devastating criticism, now look back at the time we may call "high modernity" as "The Good Old Days" for faith, church, living, and being young. Yet when such modernity prospered and had not yet been questioned by many who thought it was time to put a "post" in front of it, the period was viewed as being destructive of faith. Might we not do better simply to deal with the issues that our grandparents faced and then to deal with those that are before us, rather than to determine whether the old was "better," whether what has just passed was the only arena God could present to those who would be faithful?

Later we shall describe at least three features of high modernity. For now, let it be noted that what one historian called "the pitiless and persistent rivals" to Christianity appeared in this period, which began with the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Its thinkers proposed to replace faith with reason, Christian knowledge with critical, scientific, skeptical learning, and life under Christ's Lordship with the idea of progress. In the nineteenth century and after, the bearded godkillers of modern times — Nietzsche, Darwin, Marx, and Freud — issued their devastating challenges to faith. In practical living, ordinary people took on ways of life that undercut inherited patterns of nurture.

In the United States, religious institutions and impulses not only survived but also remained surprisingly strong. However, the faith communities had lost their privileged status, and religion had to settle for being put in a little, private box. "Religion is a private affair," Americans came to say. They assigned it a time on weekends when there was leisure. They gave it a place: home, away from work, away from where basic decisions about culture and society were made. Those were "modern times," and Christians came to accept both the bargain and the contract the society offered, although they were critical and often grumbled, retreated on many fronts, and tried to win back on others. But following the Lordship of Christ in any profound way was as hard then as it has always been and will always be. Those times were not a Golden Age for faith. Yet they inspire nostalgia. When we look upon the bad old times as the good old days, we evade dealing with what is.

Today we are given a new cultural package. We do not have to accept it. Nor do we have to accept descriptions of it, which are self-contradictory. They reach

different people and different communities in different ways. But that cultural package provides the air we breathe and the environment for what I call the mental "furnished apartments" we keep on redecorating and in which we continually rearrange the furnishings.

The young, those pioneers at the borders of postmodernity, are living in a culture that bears many resemblances to the world in which Christianity began. It is a time when "so-called gods" and "many gods and lords" beckon as they did then. Two thousand years ago, the faith and the believers, despite greater hazards and obstacles than those we know, survived and prospered. Harassment, loss of privilege, persecution, and even martyrdom shadowed their lives. Yet in the midst of distractions and lures, among the many philosophies and attitudes that people around them held to and displayed, they endured. It may be that they offer a better precedent for dealing with youth and the faith than does the recent past.

Both a plague and a feature of postmodernity is its fluidity and viscosity. It takes different shape under many eyes and in many hands. So postmodern definitions are unstable, temporary, and easily contradicted.

What preceded postmodernity? We will use an extremely broad brush and speak of "premodern" times first. There is no need to be precise about chronology. These are the "olden days" of the Middle Ages, of Reformation times, up until the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution. Of course, features of these times lived on and live on, and there are pockets where premodernity still reigns. The Amish are not the only dropouts and holdouts in respect to modernity and what followed it. But they did not and do not prevail.

Second, we will look at elements of modernity in its "late" forms, the world we are leaving but continue to live in, as do our young. And then, postmodernity, so named until the period is over, and historians can give it a better name. (No one woke up one day in 1200 A.D., for instance, and said, "Let's call our times 'the Middle Ages.'" We do that later.)

First, youth and vocational choice. In earlier times, most people had fewer vocational options than today. Boys became what their fathers had been, through apprenticeship, and girls were destined to follow their mothers' grooved existence patterns. Nobles gave birth to nobles, peasants to peasants. Then, modernity led to the chopping up of life, what we call "differentiation" and "specialization," of sorts that live on. Every profession, career, skill, and craft was precisely defined. In religion, for example, one might enter the clergy and have a clear career track for forty years: as pastor, chaplain, missionary, or whatever. Young Catholics took a lifelong vow and that settled it.

In postmodern times choice is rich, change is sudden, stability is hard to come by, and loyalty is subject to the loosening of bonds. The young person may become

anything at any time in any place. Adults retool, take on second vocations or professions or tenth careers. They choose to have temporary liaisons and to cohabit for the moment and without commitment. Marriage bonds are insecure, and vows are easily broken. Philosophies to justify the decisions that go with these, and therapies to treat them when things go wrong, compete in the marketplace of ideas and cures.

Postmodernity is a name given to a *time*, and we live not only in a time but in a description of a time. Thus: the beginnings. The expected end of the world. War times. Peace times. Doomsday. Morning for America. And we measure the use of time differently in the face of the various urgencies and luxuries these imply.

Picture the premoderns, who lived lives measured by sunup and sundown, seedtime and harvest. The monks pulled ropes on bells in the village church tower, and peasants dropped their plows and tools to bow for prayer. They would await another recognizable bell before they returned home to rest. Modernity brought precision to schedules. Nine to five. The eight-hour day. The forty-hour week. The weekend — a modern invention if ever there was one. Predictability on the calendar. Assigned roles.

Youth today observe and experience a postmodern approach to time. The weekend expands and dissolves. Leisure and vacation patterns do not follow a liturgical or even a national calendar any longer. Mother and father mesh schedules, if they schedule at all. People graze rather than sit down to eat. Women in the work force by necessity and choice have flexible schedules. The swing shift and night shift and all-night television blur boundaries of day and night. Postmodern times give the illusion of being ordered, "digitalized," but they induce society-wide chaos. And young people adapt to it and often thrive.

Postmodernity can be viewed as *place*. Paul Lakeland in *Postmodernity: Christianity in a Fragmented Age* (Fortress Press, 1997) came up with some vivid images of this time. Consider shopping. In premodern times, Main Street was made up of a parade of stores, run by Mom and Pop — and mainly Pop. In modern times, the department store thrived. One entered it, found departments in rational order, marched down clarified aisles, and paid in cash. The postmodern invention with which youth are much at home is the mall. Now, space is undifferentiated. The outdoors is brought into the indoor mall, and products are offered in dazzling and chaotic arrays.

Or, consider hotels. The premodern inn was a homey place, similar to today's Bed and Breakfasts. The modern hotel had an entrance, a registration desk straight ahead, elevators to the right or left, straight corridors to rooms. The postmodern hotel, the Hyatt or the Marriott, has huge indoor atria, a jumble of open spaces that suddenly close. There are zones, arenas, and glass elevators. Private and public

spaces become interfused. Is that better or worse than the inn or the defined hotel? It is what is available and in fashion.

Art: the assemblage, collage, montage, made up of uncoordinate bits and patches, replaces the modern and what went before it. The contemporary art that challenges and would succeed modern art has no frames or pedestals to set it apart. It clutters a floor, extends out from and into recesses in the wall, is complicated by flashing lights or sound, and blurs the boundary between art and non-art.

The nation-state as a modern invention replaced feudal estates of premodernity and overlooked tribal and natural boundaries. The product of rational choice, it was backed by armed might and imposed by colonial powers. Postmodernity has not seen the disappearance of the state, but today the various tribes and peoples try to redraw boundaries and engage in "ethnic cleansing," with no clear program in their wars. Every day invisible boundaries shift, and where someone's land stops and no-man's land begins is not clear.

No survey of postmodern situations would be complete without reference to mass media, which convey, embody, exemplify, and influence everything else. Channel-surfers, we are told, scoot past one hundred choices per hour; whoever uses a remote to coast through the channels will see a jumble of competing images. The same effect can come from watching one or two videos on MTV. All realities are equidistant and equally near, similarly alluring and forbidding at once.

What is truth? Truth is the zone in which decisions about gods and lords, God and Lord, are made and grow complex. Almost all students, victims, or advertisers of postmodernity notice that relativity and relativism are characteristic features of whatever it is. In premodern situations, there was one privileged channel of truth. Absolutes came from the laws, legends, and customs handed down by seniors or other authorities. Modernity presented a circumstance in which there were many truths, but some principled use of reason aided in discriminating and coming through critical inquiry to truth.

In postmodernity, relativism at worst and relativity at best complicate the seeker of a way, The Way. As one teacher reported, a student wrote, "Hitler had his ideas and way of life, and I have mine. How do I get to judge what he lived by?" This is the extreme case that prepares us for all the moderate ones along the way.

Young people stand between late modernity and postmodernity. Rainer Maria von Rilke wrote of how each turn in the world "reveals such children, to whom no longer what's been and not yet what's here" appears. Sophisticated college-bound teens and poor young people in the poorest parts of town partake of elements of this climate. For some, it is not difficult to proceed from the old to the new. For others, perhaps for the culture as a whole, certain periods are especially stressful and revealing: thus, "the Sixties." Historian Jacob Burckhardt wrote that at such

times "whole generations falsify themselves" and go through periods of extreme rejection and experiment. Thirty years later, more moderate experimentation continues and may be a semipermanent feature of postmodernity.

A third of a century ago, Herman Kahn and Norbert Wiener wrote about the year 2000. They presented a "longterm, surprise-free, multifold" trend in a "sensate" culture, which they suggested would become ever more programmatic, pragmatic, contractual, empirical, and secular every year. But, they also reported that the great philosophers of history in our time, who took the long view, foresaw beyond these times (=postmodernity, now?) a period of great ferment and change. They imagined new religions — some of them renewals, some of them scientifically synthetic, some nationalistic. But Kahn's and Wiener's philosophies posited a world in which the passions were stoked, the stakes were high, and the decisions were urgent. In such a scene the modern solution would no longer do. Such a moment has evidently appeared in postmodernity with its spiritual options.

Not all the turns leading up to this moment in history are destructive of faith, of the attempt to "imitate Christ" in the age of "whatever." Political scientist Robert Booth Fowler spoke of "modern" in terms of "liberal" or what we might also call an "open" republican culture that is defined by three features.

The first feature is that it privileges "secular rationality" as the basis for communication, community, discourse, and argument. Reason is used to achieve societal and personal ends; there is no need to invoke the sacred, the transcendent, the divine. The patient expects the neurosurgeon to apply modern, scientific method, not to settle for "Mormon brain surgery," or Baptist, or Buddhist. Just expert scientific work.

Legislative processes and engineering are also supposed to proceed according to this method. Modern architecture is cool, programmatic, and rational. Consider Mies van der Rohe's buildings; they could be anywhere. They have no setting, no history, no decoration.

Religion has made some use of such rationality. Modern bureaucracies in denominations and committees to advance ecumenism have often followed its principles. Religious institutions rejected by many youths display this characteristic.

Nonetheless, however necessary secular rationality is and will remain, it has been found to be spiritually unsatisfying. So the "so-called gods" are back. Most bookstores have sections labeled Spirituality, New Age, Holistic/Wholistic, Occult, Ancient, Asian, Metaphysical, Self-Help, Inspirational, and the like. Its patrons are well-off, well-educated grandchildren of secular man and secular woman, the normative models of two generations ago.

Second, the need to be tolerant to the point of being indifferent characterizes the modern liberal society. Ideology is pushed to the background, and religion

becomes a "private affair." Such acceptance of the lack of belief or the presence of different belief in others makes possible the end of holy wars. One glance at places in the world where many gods and many lords become associated with ethnic and tribal strife should convince us that we have a good thing going.

However, to a young person growing up in such a world, it soon looks as if tolerance means lack of belief. Many youth adopt this lack of belief as a mode. Others are turned off by it and seek refuge in fundamentalisms, "cults," extravagant and extreme movements. In a society where "the committed aren't civil and the civil aren't committed," apathetic civil youth are learning that to many people beliefs *do* matter and that *mere* tolerance does not do justice to them. So, again, this motif has been found to be spiritually unsatisfying, and young people seek ways past it, if they are not victims of terminal apathy. In postmodernity, will they find Jesus Christ and the "way" he brings?

A third mark of modernity that also carries over into postmodernity is extreme individualism. Young people obsessed with "peer group pressure" often disguise their loneliness. They are taught to be ambitious, to compete for market favors, to be themselves. But the stakes are high, and they take refuge in self-enforced group boundary life. They seek an identity, but they do not find it in the individualist braggadocio or isolating alienation of older siblings.

The question is, will the community to which Jesus Christ calls us appeal to today's young though it has not for almost two generations before them?

That mere "secular rationality" did not cover everything and satisfy all, though it included elements beneficial to believers, is obvious today, and the young, lacking historical perspective, can see this as well as any. In their own vernacular, they confirm this observation in millions of particular situations.

In the modern understanding, we make political, ethical, and economic decisions on the basis of secular rationality. That is, participants begin their discussion and argument "in the original position" that commits them to use only standard models of reason. Then it occurs to them that not everyone can be in on the decision. Animals, nature, fetuses, the comatose, the poor and oppressed and uneducated, the retarded, children, the senile, and more cannot be in on the decision.

So, we call in many elements that we have associated with the spiritual and the religious. We jumble intuition, memory, community, tradition, affection, and hope. *Then* we decide what to do and how to live. Maybe teenagers have always done this in their "unreasoning" moments, but they turned out not to be incapable of reasoning. They just surrounded reason with many other avenues of approach. Now most of the culture does this.

The young are caught between demands and opportunities in acute ways. They are given mixed signals. The market world tells them to compete. The com-

munity world urges them to cooperate. Which shall it be? Establishments tell them to use reason and to be reasonable, but they do not see rationality in the practices of those who urged reason upon them. They are starved for more than reason alone can give them. They want modern technological medicine, with painkillers, MRIs, and CAT scans. But they also want the presence of a physician who will speak to them, a nurse to communicate the deeper things, a pastor who opens the world of the spirit and, maybe most of all, the caring parent.

Most youth are overwhelmed by the relativism that comes with postmodern observance. They may be put off by those who run away from such a way of life into subcommunities called fundamentalism. But the serious among them, as they mature, seek other ways. Mere tolerance and mere indifference are not attitudes and expressions that will do justice to their dreams and passions.

Individualism? Yes, the young will buy into the ideology of individualism. But their peers are at least a vestigial reference group, reminiscences of what community ought to look like. So while they want to be regarded as individuals, they are learning the price of loneliness and isolation, the arrogance of "doing it my way." They may not look to the church as a place to find community, but it remains an agency that offers some possibility.

In their search for their vocation, their way that has its own decisive stamp, they are involved as are so many adults today in establishing some sort of identity in a world of flux. They seek some measure of authority in the midst of relativism and relativity. They want some spiritual experience, not merely to be told about spiritual experience.

No youth counselors or elders can come onto such a scene and find a ready audience of young people who will give privileged access to churchly authority or traditional texts. But they can also recognize that the young people are not the first Christians or potential Christians to be associated with scenes like those we described.

Early Christians, most of them young — in a world where life expectancy was so very low — lived in a culture of "many so-called gods" and the relativity that came with that culture. They were equidistant from all the Greek and Roman and sometimes Egyptian altars and icons that Paul and his contemporaries denounced. They were sorting out what was Jewish and what non-Jewish in Jesus and the communities associated with him. In the midst of the many gods came messages that there was a clarifying voice available: "for us" there is and was to be one Lord "through whom are all things and through whom we exist."

Does that one Lord stand a chance in the current go-round of "whatever"? ❁

Faithful Becoming in a Complex World: New Powers, Perils, and Possibilities

Sharon Daloz Parks

As leaders of youth in church and society, we need to become more faithfully aligned to our purpose and vocation. We need to recover the essence of what we already know and to take steps into a deeper recognition of what is at stake and how we might best proceed. We need to reflect on what is timeless and what is dramatically changed in the experience of the generations coming into adulthood after us. This kind of reflection has a particular importance in the time in which we have been asked to live — a time of "growing up post-modern . . . in an age of 'whatever.'"

William Willimon describes "the postmodern world" as a time of permanent, discontinuous change. We appear to be living in a "cusp time," one of those turning points in history — a time that generations after us will look back on and probably name in yet some other way, much as we now look back on the Renaissance and the Reformation. We know that the people living through those periods of history did not speak of themselves as living through times of rebirth and reform. It is more likely that they simply felt that familiar patterns of life and belief were shifting. Many people must have longed for things to "get back to normal."

The evidence that we live in cusp time is multifaceted. The new sciences — the new chemistry, biology, and physics — reveal a far more interrelated and dynamic universe than has heretofore been imagined. At the same time, new weapons of violence alert us to an unprecedented scale of shared vulnerability. These developments, coupled with a new ecological understanding of the integrity of creation, are awakening us to a more interdependent reality. Our cosmology is being recomposed in fundamental ways.

One dimension of this changing consciousness is evidenced in our apprehension of economic reality. Each of us increasingly lives not only within local, regional, and national economies but also in an interdependent global economy. Our hopes

and anxieties are fueled daily by events taking place half a world away. Postmodern reality is shaped by a complex web of economic forces in which we — and often, especially, our young people — are both consumers and consumed. Moreover, this shifting environmental-economic reality is matched by enormous change in our ecumenical reality — our sense of the whole inhabited world. Most of our young people are coming of age within a new meeting, and often a collision, of social-religious cultures.

In this new environmental-economic-ecumenical context, the blurred boundaries and fragmentation that mark the postmodern world abound. Yet, in order to flourish, every adolescent generation must be initiated into a cultural world that provides identity, community, coherence, and meaning. This is the context in which you and I have been called to practice ministry for and with youth.

My professional life is now located at the Whidbey Institute in Washington State. The Institute creates learning retreats and conferences that bring professionals from many sectors together to address the spiritual challenges that lie at the heart of the critical issues of our time. We also have an important program for teenagers, The Power of Hope, led by Charlie Murphy and Peggy Taylor. Offered in several different locations, this program is designed to nourish a viable hope among adolescent youth. In March 1998, one hundred fifty young people from across a broad social spectrum gathered in Portland, Oregon, for a weekend of small workshops and large events that encouraged genuine conversation, nurtured interior reflection, stimulated creative expression, and inspired participation in a wider community of belonging, responsibility, and commitment.

I had the privilege of observing one of the workshops titled "Talk Poetry." The leader, a gifted African American poet, invited a circle of twenty young people to "just take a few minutes here and begin to write. Just write what you find coming to mind, and try not to censor it. "Poetry," he said, "is the music that comes through, but first you have to break through the fear."

After a considerable period of silence and writing, he invited the young people to read to each other what they had written — one by one around the circle. Halfway around, a tall, lanky young woman read her offering with considerable power. Later, I asked if she would send me a copy. It reads:

Stream of Consciousness Talk Poetry
Sagesse Gwinn

BROWN HOPE, COLOR AND SWEETNESS, GREEN PANTS,
UNDERPANTS, TRANSCENDENTAL HOPE AND EXPERIENCE,
WINDOW, LIGHTS REFLECTED THROUGH EYES REALIZE,
SUN RAIN, GOING HOME, HERE STRANGERS, CHANNELING

EMPTY FREE SPACE, SICK SORROW, NOT AND THEN AGAIN
AT AN ANGLE, A T-SHIRT, A MURAL, A POLITICAL STATEMENT
A SPIRITUAL STATEMENT 8 8 8 8 8 8 A STATEMENT OF SELF
AND WORDS THAT END AND START IN SSSSssssssss THIS
PULSE, THIS RHYTHM ONE ONCE, NOW IN TIME AND
MOVEMENT AND GRACE, COLOR AND WOW WIGGIDY
WOGGIDY, ZIGGIDY ZOOMIDY, WOW TICK TACK A TICK A
RICK RACK A ROCK, DEATH, STILLNESS, LIVE BIRTH REBIRTH
NOT BEING AFRAID OF FEAR AND FEARLESS BEHAVIOR
NOT BEING AFRAID OF DREAMS VISION QUEST VANITY
WHAT IS IT, VANITY, PULSATING RHYTHMIC REMEDY, PLA-
GIARIZING VANITY AND EGOTISTICAL EGOS WITHOUT
ANY SHADOW OR ECHO OR WHAT, WHO, WHY, WHEN
DID I JUMP AND WHEN WILL I LAND, DID I FALL OR AM I
FLYING CAN YOU FEEL MY BREATH AS YOU BREATHE AND
THE AIR BECOMES A PART OF US AND THEN THE PATTERNS
SHIFT THE MAGIC OF THE CARPET THE CARPET FLIES INTO
THE EYES OF COLOR IDEAS STREAMING FORTH WITH LIFE,
FERTILITY, COMMA COMMA COMA COBRA AND
SSSSSSSSSSSSSSS SNAKE PERIOD TURN EACH SELF INTO A
STORY LIFE THE PAGES FROM THE HEART AND SOAR AND
SING AND OHHHHHHHHHHHHH WHAT A FEELING OF
FREEDOM KINGDOM AND PEACEFULNESS IN FULLNESS OF
SPIRIT AND BODY AND EVEN MY TOES AND MY FINGERS A
FAMILY, A COMMUNITY, A TRUST, A REFLECTION, A
STRENGTH.
A FAMILY, A COMMUNITY, A TRUST, A REFLECTION, A
STRENGTH.
A LETTER A [ ]
A LETTER A SYMBOL WHAT, BAT MAT CAT INTO REGRES-
SION, NO SUPPRESSION,
HELL NO HELL O HELL O

AMERICA

If the postmodern world is marked by the blurring of traditional boundaries and fragmentation, this is a postmodern poem! It is also fragments of life being turned into jazz. Youth ministry in our time requires the capacity to imagine how, within this improvisational world, young people can discover faithful, meaningful, and joy-filled pathways into adulthood as adults and teens together must create new patterns of life.

Faith Development for the Common Good

For more than twenty years, I have been studying the development of faith. I have particularly studied the third decade of life — the "twenty-something" years.[1] Initially, I felt that it was important to speak about faith in a manner that could embrace the whole human family. Following on the prior work of James Fowler, I described faith as the activity of meaning-making in its most comprehensive dimensions embracing all that is ultimate and most intimate — an activity that all human beings share, whether it is expressed in religious or secular terms.

Later, however, I discovered that I wanted to research a particular kind of faith, the faith that is manifest in practices of love and justice. I wanted to study the formation of people who, even in a postmodern world, are able to live on behalf of the common good rather than just for "me and mine." With my colleagues, Larry Daloz and Cheryl and James Keen, I began to study more than one hundred people who are able to wade into the growing complexity, diversity, and moral ambiguity of our time and live as the kind of citizen-leaders we need. We interviewed people from many walks of life who as a group roughly represented the demographic make-up of our society. We explored two primary questions: How were their lives formed? How did they sustain a commitment to the common good? These are critical questions for leaders in youth ministry as we must ask, "How do we respond to adolescent youth in a manner that enables them to become adults who are faithful to the common good?"

A New Commons

Of course one might quickly and rightly ask, "Whose common good?" In a pluralistic world, we are immediately suspicious that a narrow notion of the common good may be imposed upon all. Thus it is useful to meditate on the image that informs the concept of the common good: the commons.

The image of the commons has shaped the civic, political, and economic imagination of our society in a primary way. In its most classic form, it was the New England green where everyone could have a cow; it was surrounded by the church, the schoolhouse, the general store, the bank, the town hall, and a flock of households with the farmlands beyond. But the commons also took many other forms: Main Street in middle America, the bodega in the Puerto Rican community, the wharf on the West Coast, the square at the county seat on market day in the South, the ice-skating pond in the winter. The commons was the place where people met, talked, listened, and worked out how they were going to live together over time.

The commons does not function well as merely a nostalgic, romantic image. The commons holds a mix of human sins and graces. Yet the image of the commons

matters because the commons was the center of a shared world. Across the boundaries of race and class, people who reflect on the power of the commons in their own experience often remark, "I think when I was growing up [within a tangible sense of 'a commons'], there were more people who cared about you."

Though fragments of an earlier sense of a more cohesive commons remain for some, all of us are now plunged into the life of a new commons — global in scope and personal in influence. The challenge of youth ministry today can be understood, in part, as the task of attending to the formation of human life within the context of the powers, perils, and possibilities of the new global commons. Those of us who stand in the Reformed tradition believe that to be sons and daughters of the Reformation is to know that we are forever called to ongoing reformation at the hand of God. That does not mean we like it. It does not mean that ministry to youth is made easier by this knowledge. But it does provide perspective as we seek to align our lives and commitments with the youth to whom and with whom we minister in the dramatically changing world of the new commons.

New Powers

The powers, perils, and possibilities of the new commons intersect in important ways with the considerable new powers, perils, and possibilities that mark the life of every adolescent who is stepping into adulthood.

Our society is keenly aware that adolescent behavior is fueled, in part, by significant changes in hormonal activity and by the development of the capacity for adult sexuality. But dramatically underrecognized is the potential for a simultaneous development of new powers of mind that can, in turn, foster new powers of heart and soul. As Jean Piaget has taught us, the early teenage years harbor the development of "formal operational thought." This means that if a young person dwells in a context that encourages it, the adolescent years mark the emergence of reflective thought and the capacity for abstract thought. Objects can become symbols — keys to whole patterns of meaning.

Embedded in this new power is the capacity for "third person perspective-taking." This is an extraordinary achievement. The grade school child can manage only "second person perspective-taking." That is, when the grade school child stands where I am now standing and looks at the podium, he or she knows that you see the podium differently from where you are sitting. But to mentally see what you see, the grade school child must abandon his or her own perspective and mentally run around to where you are sitting in order to "see through your eyes."

The achievement of "third person perspective-taking" is what is practiced in a complicated conversation. You know what you are saying and feeling, and *at the same time* you are listening to the other person, and you are seeing what they are saying.

It is as though you are a third person who can see the whole interaction between you and the other, and how each is affecting the other, and you can hold the whole thing at once. It is a very complicated mental operation. And it is a big deal. It changes the way young people experience themselves in the world.

We do our young people a great disservice when we speak of this new power simply as critical thought. New questions can now be asked, and they can sound critical; however, the essence of this emerging power in adolescent lives is the capacity for reflection and for wondering in new ways about the relationship between self and world.[2]

This new power is vital in the development of both the moral and the spiritual life. It allows the individual to take into account the perspective of the other — even many others. It enables the individual to come closer to participating in the perspective of God. It represents an enlargement of consciousness and an enhanced capacity for wonder.

One Saturday afternoon, I met a friend who had just come from a bar mitzvah. "Oh, Sharon," she said, "this was the kind of occasion that is one of the best parts of being Jewish." Then she described how the young man who was having his bar mitzvah happened to be a particularly small thirteen-year-old. As is the custom, he had prepared a passage to read in Hebrew and a question that arises from the passage that he posed to a selected circle of friends and wise ones who had gathered on his behalf. In the circle that day was one of the most revered philosophy professors at Harvard. After a pause, it was this professor who first responded and said to the young man, "You know, I wonder about that, too." This was an initiation into an adulthood of wonder and new possibility.

When I first began formal research in faith development, I interviewed a person who is now in a position of significant religious and educational leadership. As he reflected on his formative years, he told me that he had grown up in a Presbyterian church. When he was in the ninth grade, his family had visited New York City at a time when Billy Graham was there on one of his crusades. This man was moved by the powerful music, and what Billy Graham was saying that particular evening made more sense to him at that point than the answers he was receiving elsewhere. He responded to the altar call. But what seemed even more significant to me was a moment three weeks later on a family vacation when he was lying on the beach alone. (Now at these points even articulate people often become quite inarticulate in faith development interviews, and this was the case here.) "That sun was OK," he said. As I worked to listen into what he meant, it was clear that in that time alone on the beach he had an important experience of communion, an enlarged communion, between himself and the sun, the universe — Life, Spirit, God.

Such listening often triggers one's own memories. I thought, "Well, when I was

in the ninth grade I don't remember that the sun meant much to me." Then I thought, "But the moon did." (Now, anyone trained in Jungian theory might respond, "Yes, he is a male and was attracted to the sun, and you're a woman. . . ." But let's set that aside for the moment in the service of another insight.)

When I was a teenager, at night before I went to bed I would often stand at my bedroom window and pray. When the moon was full, it served as a focus of soul and spirit. I know that I was not praying to the moon, but it did serve to anchor an enlarged consciousness and a sense of participation in a wider world of being. That experience was qualitatively different than when I had prayed six or seven years earlier.

Once when I spoke of this, someone responded, "What you are suggesting is that the adolescent will have a high." Indeed, in the period we describe as adolescence, the changes going on in body, mind, and spirit will find their expression in some form of "high." Whether the milieu is fast cars, sex, music, sports, religion, drugs, or bungee jumping, the adolescent soul will seek a new home in an expanding world of new wonders and possibilities.

New Perils

Along with this new capacity for an enlarged consciousness, there are also new perils. Enlarged consciousness creates new self-consciousness. This can be both wonderful and terrible. Some of you have known young people who, when they were perhaps nine years old, seemed to be sturdy and resilient, confident, even feisty, and great to be with. Then you do not see them for awhile, and suddenly they are not only fourteen, they are also tongue-tied, self-conscious, and not nearly as comfortable with themselves or anyone else as they previously appeared to be. Or, if they remain outgoing and engaged, there is, nevertheless, a marked difference. Now able "to see the other seeing me," they are vulnerable to the tyranny of the "they." What do "they" think? How am I seen in "their" eyes?

One sixteen-year-old expressed it to me this way: "I wonder what they are thinking about me, because I know what I am thinking about them." In the circle of Talk Poetry that I described earlier, another young woman who spoke appeared capable, articulate, and socially an integral part of the group. Yet she had written: "I am nervous about being accepted. I am OK here at The Power of Hope. But I am still nervous about being accepted."

In this new awareness, this enlarged consciousness, there is not only a new capacity for a "high." There is also a new capacity for angst — for a new recognition of suffering, fear, dread, and a highly charged sense of the threat of meaninglessness.

Another young woman, Erin Lopez, who spoke in the circle of Talk Poetry, read this poem, composed during the second round of writing. It is titled "Snake."

At the base of my spine
poison-energy, collects
coiled in hatred, in anger, in acid

hate, aggression
fear — blocking; me, every movement I make
painful
screaming
for attention
hear me, feel THIS, Acknowledge ME! - SHE screams,
she, hisses

she, SIGHS . . .

Here, at the base of my spine
coiled in its own misery — energy, of misery
lies a poison
-Snake-

why do you hurt me
why do I care
why do you hate me
why doesn't Goddess/God Care

& she wraps her haughtiness around her
like a smug teacher= pain as her ally
& sniff & speak & say:
pain, is a teacher, no one ever forgets
Snake,

this pain it kills, it kills

me
snake why do you hurt me so? I beg plead cry raw
all she does is coil, tighter — sniff, snarl, grimace,
breathe,

Sigh . . . . .

HhhIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIIISSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSSS

When I asked Erin if she had some idea of what Snake represents, she responded with a compelling sense of tentative, thoughtful awareness. "I think so. And I think when I figure it out, then I will be able to go on stronger." My own sense is that though we very well may not know at all what this poem is about in its specificity, it conveys the capacity of young people to know the painful depths of the reality we all share.

Interiority—At Risk

A growing competence in perspective-taking, a new self-consciousness, an enlarged capacity for wonder, and the ability to be in dialogue with one's own pain and the pain of others all reveal the adolescent's readiness for the development of interiority. Depending upon the nature of the surrounding environment, the adolescent soul can grow deeper, wider, higher. If the adolescent is encouraged to listen within, space is opened in which Spirit can more fully become at home. There is more space for inspiration, for creativity, for becoming. There is more space both for wounding and for healing. Whether or not this spaciousness of spirit is enabled to grow is determined in significant measure by how you and I minister, because the culture at large has set this capacity for interiority at risk.

I had the privilege of working with the MBA program at the Harvard Business School as they began to readdress ethics and leadership in the curriculum. During this time, we discovered that the pressures to meet the terms of competition that come from outside the self can thwart the development of reflective interiority. Further, in a society in which all are increasingly, systematically distracted and entertained, inner reflection comes at a premium. Yet the development of interiority remains essential to the formation of a mature conscience — the capacity to reflect on one's behavior and to make ethical choices.

In several sectors of youth ministry we find new attention being paid to the value and importance of young people having time for shared silence. This is one of the signs in our time of the faithfulness of the church. This dimension of ministry was not evident even a few years ago. There is a growing recognition that perhaps we need to change our ways of ministry to be responsive to what is now at stake as a new generation comes to adulthood in a world of multitasking and the pervasive presence of video technologies and other electronic media.[3]

Accordingly, I am deeply grateful that my stepdaughter, Kate, and my stepson, Todd, have grown up in the faith and company of Quakers — the Society of Friends — and that they have learned the power of shared silence and listening within. This has occurred primarily within the context of a wonderful set of retreats for Quaker youth in New England. Every six weeks or so, Young Friends gather from all over Vermont, New Hampshire, and Massachusetts. They are led by Chris Jorgenson and a wonderful staff who work with her. The staff has a genius for creating good space with clear boundaries in which the Young Friends can themselves become responsible for the welfare and decision-making of the group, which is often as large as seventy for a single retreat. Part of how the staff creates and maintains safe boundaries is to set three clear rules, which the young people themselves help to maintain: No drugs or alcohol, no sex, and "keep the caps on the magic markers."

With this in mind, I asked Peggy Taylor, who leads The Power of Hope pro-

gram, how they create safe space. They also have three rules: No drugs or alcohol, no sex, and (interestingly) no media — no boom boxes, no magazines, no Walkmans. Much of their program is built around creativity, and the arts and music abound. But it is music and art that the young people create within and among themselves. They are not rendered passive. They are not encouraged to be mere consumers. Space is provided where young people experience community and can gain access to the creative, transforming power within and among them. They are initiated into active participation in the power of new possibilities. With the leadership of committed and creative adults, they discover positive images of their own emerging adulthood and experience what it might mean to work with others to create a viable future for all.

The New Media in the New Commons

In light of the adolescent readiness for imagination of self and world, it is vital to pay close attention to the role of the mass media in the new global commons. If every generation of adults, by intention or default, passes to the next the "best" by which we have come to live, *our* generation is primarily using the technologies of the new media to transmit that imagination into the heart of the commons. It is, therefore, a matter of considerable import to note that approximately $4.5 billion is spent worldwide on advertising every year, and a growing percentage is targeted at teenagers and children. The bodies and souls of our youth are being transformed into the image and likeness of markets. I believe that generations after us will look back with sadness and dismay to see that we were so seemingly naive about the power of images to shape the souls of our youth.

Those of us who stand in the Protestant tradition are people of the Word. We are not so much people of image and sacrament. Now in this new time of reformation, we are being challenged, I think, to reclaim a rich, religious understanding of the power of images and the way in which they become embedded in us. On behalf of a generation that is steeped in the visual and the tactile as primary ways of learning and communicating, we need to get up to speed.

In *Common Fire*, we describe the kinds of images that are important to the formation of the citizen-leaders that are now needed. Among these are three of particular importance for adolescents. The first is positive images of self. One woman told us, "I was seen as a 'watercolor' child all through high school. I've worked hard to find more vibrant colors .... I have oil paints in my soul."[4] Young people are seeking positive images of self in the new global commons.

Second, we found that it is also very important to have images of "the world as it is" — images that are true, including images of things that should not be so.

One person we interviewed, a legislator, often remembers a line from Pericles. "'We [must] obey those unwritten laws that it is an acknowledged shame to break' .... You've got to have a consensus that certain things are simply not done." Young people in the new commons need clearly defined images of truth, beauty, justice — and injustice.[5]

Third, it is critically important that on the threshold of adulthood, young people have planted in their souls images of meaningful transformation. Cynicism thrives wherever life presents itself as static or ruled by lesser powers than the transforming spirit of life itself that Christians profess to see in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus and the birth of the church.

Therefore, as we seek to respond faithfully to this generation of youth, one of the central questions before us is, "Who is crafting and mediating the images by which this generation will live and die?" Certainly one answer to that question is the film industry.

Titanic — An Attracting Story

At the present time, James Cameron's *Titanic* promises to break box office records, and notably large numbers of teenagers are flocking to this film.[6] Reflection on the story and images mediated by this film and observed through the lens of adolescent powers and vulnerabilities that we have sketched here may be useful in thinking about ministry to and with youth in our time.

In a *New York Times* article harvesting international commentary on why *Titanic* is such an attracting film, Andre Klib in Bonn, Germany, was reported to have said:

> The love story of *Titanic* is merely the wrapping on what really drives the movie. It is a picture of a wholeness that we have lost, the picture of a sunken world in which, from the captain to the mechanic, from the immigrant to the millionaire, everyone had a secure place. At this end of our *Titanic* century, after the collapse of Communism as the last integral ideology in anticipation of coming conflicts and crisis, the world can no longer be seen, grasped, in great structures of thought. Only through images [metaphors] can we still understand the world. The cinema delivers the images in which humanity and the cosmos blend again in a feeling of unity.[7]

Young people would probably not describe why they like *Titanic* with anything like the words of Andre Klib. But perhaps we can glimpse how it might be that this film does, in fact, function for teenagers in a manner very much like what Klib describes, as *Titanic* captures important pieces of the adolescent's reality in a blend of humanity and cosmos.

A Love Story

This rendering of *Titanic* is a love story featuring a handsome young man, Jack, who is booked in steerage/third class, and a beautiful young woman, Rose, who resides with the upper class. Echoing the mythic strains of Romeo and Juliet, the story is of romance writ large and confirms the power of love to transcend social expectations and even death. But we are mistaken, I think, to believe that this alone accounts for the power of this film for this generation.

Unamuno has written that the temple is the place where we go to weep in common. In today's society, movie theaters function as temples for many,[8] and there is a good deal of evidence that *Titanic* creates a place where people go to weep in common. I understand that it is considered quite legitimate to cry at the end of *Titanic* — every time you see it. What is the crying really for?

Titanic is a film in which Prince Charming and hundreds more die because of a quest for wealth and headlines, combined with hubris on several fronts, including serious miscalculations about the ability of technology to triumph over nature. Many of our young people understand the resonance of these themes with the patterns of our own time.[9] But note that at another level this film is also about "absent parents."

The film says nothing about Jack's parents or family; they are never referred to in any way. He is on his own — a young man off on an adventure across the Atlantic. We learn that Rose's father has somewhat recently died, and he apparently squandered or mismanaged a fortune, leaving his wife and daughter with only the appearance of wealth, even less affection for him, and little for each other.[10] Moreover, in a desperate effort to preserve financial and social security, Rose's mother is apparently willing to sacrifice her daughter (in this case to a loveless marriage). The aspiration to financial security at any cost appears to be the only image of adulthood that this mother has to offer her daughter — the image in which she, herself, has lived her life. Images of "absent parents" ring true and serve as images of "the world as it is" for many youth today.

What is most interesting is that the youth, finding no place for themselves in the adult world at the center of things (for example, at the "family" dinner table in the first-class dining room), seem to flee to the margins of the ship, the margins of this floating replica of society. Most of their big scenes happen at the railings. In the first big scene, Rose, driven to despair and falling into deep angst, runs to the stern, crying, and threatens to jump overboard. Jack, hearing her distress, follows her. It is there that they meet for the first time, as he coaxes her back from the railing, prophetically describing how cold the water would be and how quickly one would die.

When they next meet they appear again at the railing, this time amidships. In

a delightful bit of play, he teaches her how to spit off the side of the ship. It is a positive step in her attempt to break out of the conventional constraints for a woman of her time. Rose provides an image of a new woman, breaking out of the inappropriate strictures of her society, claiming life as best she knows how — certainly a resonant image in today's society where, for example, an inordinate number of young women are in treatment for eating disorders that arise from a toxic mix of both an effort to resist inappropriate expectations and an aspiration to fit the body images purveyed by an advertising-saturated culture.[11]

In perhaps *Titanic's* most widely advertised scene, Jack and Rose are again at the railing — this time perched on the tip of the bow. The sunset is resplendent, the music soars, and as the ship dangerously picks up speed, they are "flying." In this dramatic moment, the energies of the young couple combine with the tremendous power of the ship, the beauty of the sea, and the cosmos itself. It is a "high" — an absolute, glorious "high"! This is followed by a descent into the bowels of the ship (again at the margins rather than at the center) for spirited dancing with the others in steerage and for lovemaking in the baggage hold — all an extension of the kind of "high" so resonant with the adolescent soul.

After the ship has struck the iceberg and is going down, we see Jack and Rose, now having come full circle, again at the railing where at the opening of the film she was courting death. A transformation has occurred. Though she has refused a secure seat in a lifeboat with her mother in order to remain with Jack, Rose no longer wants to die. Together they make every possible reach for life. She wants to live if she can also love. Through the power of relationship, despair has been transformed into hope. As the ship is heading down and the stern rises up out of the water, they climb up on top and cling to the railing in a valiant, tenacious bid for life against the odds.

After the ship goes down, a piano top becomes a raft that can only hold one of them. Jack urges Rose to claim life, even as the icy grip of the sea carries him away.

Rose chooses to live, and we are led to believe that she later marries, has children, and lives a very adventurous life. Through her, *Titanic* becomes a story of love and transformation — and also a story of a kind of faithfulness.

At the end of the film, Rose is an old, wise crone who has been brought by the treasure seekers onto a ship above the place where the *Titanic* went down. A part of the drama has been built around the huge blue jewel that the false fiancé gave her, the *coeur de la mer* — the heart of the sea. The search for the *Titanic* has been, in part, a search for this jewel that insurance records claim went down with the ship. Not so. Rose has kept it across all the years, telling no one. In the night, when there is no one about, still in her long nightgown she slips out of her state-

room. Then, in the last great scene at a railing, she takes this extraordinary jewel hanging from a diamond necklace and drops the whole thing into the sea, as it were, giving what she can to the one who gave her life. This gesture transcends any quest for wealth and fame. It is a gesture of fidelity to a more meaningful story than would be told by the headlines that would flow if she revealed her treasure. In an age of divorce, cheap profits, and celebrity politics, the adolescent soul hungers for gestures of fidelity.

Likewise, the adolescent soul hungers for truth-telling and for images of things as they are. In America it is difficult for us to acknowledge the racial tensions that still plague us and the growing class divide. *Titanic* is a vivid portrayal of both. Recently I was in conversation with a mother whose young teenage daughter had gone with her to see *Titanic*. Afterward when they were talking about it, the daughter, in her own way raising the issues of economic class, said, "If we had been on the *Titanic*, which deck would we have been on?" And her mother (who knows that they would have been on the upper decks) responded, "What deck would you want to be on?" Her daughter said, "I think I'd want to be on the lower decks."

This film dispenses positive images of self. Jack is not only good looking, he is a new kind of man. He does not wield a gun. He is not only courageous, he is a very connected guy. When Rose is debating the merits of suicide, though they have barely met, he says, "Well, if you jump, I'll have to jump, too; I'm involved now."

Finally, there is one more image that may be particularly important for us who seek to minister to and with young people. Rose's survival was dependent not only on the courage, good humor, and fidelity of the young man she learned to love. Her survival was dependent also on the good adult who figured out how to get the people out of his not-full lifeboat into another not-full lifeboat so that he could return to seek out anyone still alive in the freezing water. In this current rendering of the *Titanic* myth, he is the only one in the many only partially filled lifeboats who is able to act in a manner that transcends merely his own salvation.

A "Good Enough" Story?

For all of these and undoubtedly other reasons, *Titanic* is a powerful story for many young people today. In some ways, it is a good and important story. But is it good enough? Is it sufficient? I don't think so. Therefore, I pose the question: Why isn't *Titanic* a "good enough" story for the personal, social, and spiritual formation of the next generation?

As I ponder this question, there is another scene that is at work in my soul. Several years ago, I lived in an apartment in an old Victorian home originally built by Mr. Mahan for his family in New England. He later died on the *Titanic* before his family was fully grown. Several weeks after the tragedy, a man who had survived came

to visit the family. He told them Mr. Mahan had been in one of the lifeboats, but when he had realized that there would not be room for all, he had left the lifeboat. He was last seen standing at the railing of the ship, saying his rosary. This piece of the *Titanic* story was told to me by his granddaughter, who devotes her considerable energies to working on behalf of encouraging economic support for the people and institutions of Haiti. She is a devout Roman Catholic Christian, and she believes she has a legacy to live up to. It seems to me that her grandfather had been given stories and symbols by which he could live — and die.

What stories, symbols, songs, and practices of life do we have and want to offer as gifts to the formation of a new generation living on a new commons? What are the primary images of self and world that are being offered to them as they are ready to enter into the perspectives of others and to enlarge the space within their own souls? For large numbers of youth, the mall and MTV as well as school, soccer team, and perhaps church constitute "the commons." What legacy will assist them in becoming creative citizens in a world that none of us can quite yet imagine? Do we have true stories to tell about the transformation of despair into love and hope? Do we live and give an honorable account of the sacred integrity of creation and our embeddedness in it? Do we orient our youth to technology in ways that are free of hubris? Do we model a gracious anticipation of who our youth are becoming and provide real space for them at the center of our common life? Do we embody an excellence of adulthood to which they may aspire?

In Pennsylvania, not very far from here, is the Radnor Meeting House, the home of the Radnor Society of Friends. Dorothy Steere, a woman now in her nineties who raised her two daughters in that meeting, recently asked one of them, "What was it like for you to grow up in Radnor Meeting?" Her daughter responded, "When we were young people in this meeting, we didn't really understand what you adults got from sitting in silence. But we knew that 'whatever' it was, we wanted it."

In an age of "whatever" that is full of promise, peril, and new possibilities, we seek, sift, and sort images for ourselves and for the generations after us to live by. We find ourselves asking haunting questions like: When are we being faithful in a changing world, and when are we merely compromising? In such moments, you and I demand guidance and insight from an ancient memory. We may find ourselves drawn to the letter written to the church at Philippi where we read again the timeless text: "Finally, my friends, *whatever* is true, *whatever* is honorable, *whatever* is just, *whatever* is pure, *whatever* is lovely, *whatever* is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. And what you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, do; and the God of peace will be with you."[12]

NOTES

1. See Sharon Parks, *The Critical Years: Young Adults and the Search for Meaning, Faith, and Commitment* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

2. "Critical thought" in its most developed form is the capacity to examine the motivations, context, and limitations of thought itself.

3. In another example, the Youth Ministry and Spirituality Project, codirected by Andrew Dreitcer and Mark Yaconelli and based at San Francisco Theological Seminary, is an initiative designed to work with fifteen congregations to assist youth and their leaders in cultivating spiritual practices that foster the development of interiority.

4. Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 146.

5. Ibid., p. 148.

6. Note that these are primarily middle- and upper-class youth. This film that dramatizes class divisions is typically not even being shown in lower-class neighborhoods, which are, significantly, seeing *Amistad*.

7. *The New York Times*, April 26, 1998, the Arts Section, p. 29.

8. See Margaret R. Miles, *Seeing and Believing: Religion and Values in the Movies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

9. It is reasonable to speculate that a part of the power of *Titanic* for young people today is how it serves to portray our relationship with nature. When many of our practices as a society presuppose ignorance of what is required for a sustainable relationship with the natural world, *Titanic* is a story in which nature has the last word. When the ship hits the iceberg and a shudder goes through it, a long time passes before there is any realization of what is actually happening. Some of our young people feel that this is a metaphor for what is happening to our planet. The shudder has gone through the planet, and we do not yet recognize the import of what is happening to us.

10. Note that there are other conventional myths about women — e.g. Cinderella, Snow White — in which there is an invisible, failed husband, father, or both, and only the women remain visible in a tangle of unhappy relationships.

11. See Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House: Women's Development in Communities of Faith* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1997) pp. 134-138.

12. Philippians 4:8-9 (Revised Standard Version, italics added).

Home and Pilgrimage: Deep Rhythms in the Adolescent Soul

Sharon Daloz Parks

Once upon a time, a wise professor advised an entering freshman class, "I hope that as you take notes throughout your college career, you will include what is not being said." Particularly in a time of significant historical change, it is important to pay attention to what has not been said, to what is apt to be neglected. The attempt to do that prompts my reflections here.

Two people recently brought to my attention a special section of *The New York Times* that was devoted to a descriptive analysis of today's teenagers. What I found both particularly useful and sobering were the first two paragraphs of the lead article:

> Trying to label America's nearly 60 million teenagers is about as easy as staying on the trail of a snowboarder in a whiteout. No definition can stretch far enough to include bubbly Hanson fans and moody Marilyn Manson devotees, and marijuana-smoking home boys and savvy junior entrepreneurs, born-again virgins and single moms, student activists and frustrated truants, especially when one teenager might inhabit several of those identities. As adults circle, fascinated, teenagers survive and thrive within these interlocking universes. If these teenagers must be tagged, call them the autonomous generation, creating themselves in nobody's image but their own.[1]

Autonomous?

What I find disturbing in this first paragraph is the label, "the autonomous generation," and the description, "creating themselves in nobody's image but their own." Particularly in a society where vast amounts of money are spent by the advertising industry to form teens in the image of their clients' commercial interests, thinking of teens in this way misuses the language, distorts the truth of their lives, and utterly ignores the power of the social contexts that shape us all.

The article continues, offering an example of an "autonomous" teenager:

> Nicole Hernandez is one such 1990s teenager. She lives in Elmhurst, Queens, but not with her parents. Fleeing a troubled home, she became an emancipated minor last year and moved in with her boyfriend and his mother. Nicole likes going to clubs and concerts, but she spends most of her time juggling high school classes, chores, and a full-time restaurant job.
>
> "It is hard," she said during a recent interview on her day off from work. "I have to help pay the rent, and if I don't pass all my classes I don't graduate. But then there are days when I just want to hang out with my friends and be young, like I was a year ago."

The label "autonomous" and the description "emancipated" do not convey the reality of this young person's life. Such language does, however, absolve adults of our responsibility to support, nurture, and accompany adolescent youth. Surely, a vital part of adolescent development is the growing capacity to take responsibility for oneself and others, but in our society, so strongly steeped in an ideology of individualism, we too readily deny our interdependence as human beings with each other and with the natural world. We are much too quick to seek and to celebrate "autonomy" as the capacity to stand, to act, and to live alone — self-sufficient and needing no one. Indeed, the conventional psychological take on adolescence all too often rests on the assumption that as soon as a young person crosses the threshold of puberty and becomes a "teen," parents and other adults no longer influence young lives, and the "peer group" becomes the only power and value.

We begin to move into a more accurate reading of adolescent psychology by noticing that if the peer group has significant power with adolescent youth, "autonomy" is not the dynamic at play. Moreover, what is happening in adolescent development is something more profound than moving from dependence to independence. The motion of the adolescent life is a movement into participation in a wider world within which family and community play an important but changing role. All who listen closely to teenagers know that to become an adolescent does not mean that one desires to abandon a good enough home. It means becoming part of a wider world and a larger social structure.

Home and Pilgrimage

Consider two companion metaphors that capture the rhythms of this more complex movement in the adolescent soul. The metaphors are "home" and "pilgrimage."

During their childhood and teenage years, my husband's children, Kate and Todd, regularly spent time with us at our home in a very rural area of forest and

fields in northern Vermont.[2] About the time that Kate turned thirteen, she arranged one Saturday to get together with her childhood friend and neighbor, Natalie. When Natalie came over to our house, the two of them wandered outside. It was a lovely summer day. An hour, maybe two-and-a-half hours went by, and then the phone rang. It was Kate. She was calling from the general store in our little town of Glover, about four miles away. "We wandered off through the woods and made our way across lots," she explained. "We really weren't sure where we were going, but we managed to end up in Glover. Will you come get us?" Of course we said yes, got in the car, and went to fetch them.

On the way back home, Kate and Natalie were full of stories — the good fun and exhilaration of venturing forth from home through unfamiliar terrain. Clearly all of us had crossed some new threshold.

Two years went by, and Todd turned thirteen. As it happened, one weekend in the dead of winter, Todd brought his friend, Adam, along with him to our home. On Saturday afternoon, Todd and Adam decided they would prepare themselves for an expedition. When there is three feet of snow and freezing temperatures, you do not wander into the woods in T-shirts and shorts. Indeed, they donned jackets, boots, hats, mufflers, gloves — then added a knife, a rope, and an axe. At the last minute, they also opted for snowshoes. We sent them off with good wishes.

Time went by — an hour, two-and-a-half hours. The phone rang. It was Todd. They had traveled as far as the neighbors a quarter of a mile away — just beyond any sight of our house. The neighbors had welcomed them in and served them hot chocolate, and now, "Would you come and give us a ride home?" Todd asked.

At whatever age, a good life is a rich mix of venturing and abiding[3] — home and pilgrimage. These moments in the lives of Kate, Natalie, Todd, and Adam are emblematic of the recomposing of home and the new possibilities of pilgrimage during the adolescent years. Home and pilgrimage depend upon each other. But our society tends to overvalue the journey in ways that eclipse the significance of home.[4]

Journey at the Expense of Home

There are many reasons why our society and especially our religious culture have overvalued the journey at the expense of home. The word "journey" is rooted in "jour," meaning day — a day's travel, ongoing travel through time. The word "pilgrimage," in contrast, signifies going out from a homeplace and then returning home with gifts, blessings, wisdom. Thus the interdependence of "home" and "pilgrimage." In religious-spiritual and other cultural literature, traditionally the images of home and pilgrimage were profoundly linked. This began to shift, however, about two hundred years ago. Particularly since the Enlightenment, we have been keenly aware of

the limitations of our knowledge — especially our knowledge of God, Truth, Ultimate Reality. We have become poignantly aware of the relativized and partial character of truth. Our understanding is always incomplete — and, hence, we have a consciousness of always needing to press further in an ongoing intellectual and spiritual journey toward but never quite arriving at in our quest for truth and wholeness.

Many people in American society are immigrants. We have left our "homelands," and we have not returned. For this we pay a psychic price — a soul price. Moreover, the Industrial Revolution separated home from the means of production. The workplace and the homeplace have become increasingly bifurcated, again at the cost of "balance," family, community, and aspirations toward an integrated life.

When I was first beginning to explore the power of the relationship between these metaphors, I was in New Zealand. I will always remember how on the first evening that I was there, after I had spoken about these themes, a woman very purposefully sat down beside me and said, "I left the church, but I felt that I should still find a way to attend to my spiritual life. So I decided I would pay attention to my dreams." Then she said, "The first two figures who appeared were a homemaker and a pilgrim." I was surprised and intrigued. She continued, "Yes, I grew up in a home where my father was an alcoholic, and I never really had a chance to feel a sense of home until after I was an adult and he had died. Then I moved into a home that was the first home I ever really loved. But I subsequently gave up that home in order to go to seminary." And then she said, "In my dream, and in the reflection on it afterwards, the pilgrim was strong, robust, and striding along. The homemaker, however, was small and angry. I couldn't get them to talk to each other until first the pilgrim comforted the homemaker."

The next day when I was speaking with another group, this same woman was there, and I asked her to share her story. Then I invited everyone present to reflect on whether or not there was a pilgrim and a homemaker within them. In the discussion that followed, one man spoke with particular poignancy, saying, "I guess I identify the pilgrim with the career part of my life, and I identify the homemaker with the personal part of my life." (This was not what I had intended, but others also spoke in these terms.) He went on to say how much he wished that those dimensions of his life were related in a more adequate way.

As we reflect on the new powers of body, mind, heart, and soul that emerge during adolescence, we recognize the development of a capacity for a new experience of transcendence, a new "high" — a kind of soaring journey beyond where we have been. Here also we recognize that there is a corresponding development of a new experience of immanence, a new kind of intimacy, a new kind of belonging, a qualitatively new experience of home and tribe — since "now I can see you seeing me see you."[5]

The Power of Table and Hearth

With this dimension of development in mind, it is useful to note the power of the table. In the book *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World,* my colleagues and I tell the story of the findings in our study of the formation of more than one hundred people who are able to sustain commitment to the common good and practice the kind of citizenship that is now needed. One of the patterns we observed is that for many, though not for all, the family dinner table had an important place in their formation. The practice of the table is a primary way by which we learn the habits of belonging and lay claim to the practices of *civitas.* Douglas Meeks has said that the table is a place where you know there will be a place for you, where what is on the table will be shared, and where you will be placed under obligation. At the table we learn the arts of participation, gratitude, sharing, and conversation.

Across all societies, human beings eat together (except, of course, in our fast-food culture where one can find "stand-up gourmet" restaurants). We must eat in order to live, and in the face of that shared vulnerability, human beings gather together and eat in common.[6] During adolescence the table can become more, rather than less, important. As adolescents begin to explore a wider world, table and hearth can remain a meeting place for family, as well as with others. The table can be an important element in a new composition of self and world (even if perhaps at times it becomes a stormier place).

We intuitively know this. Someone recently remarked, "I have all of these eighth graders, and I really do not know what to do to bring them together." To which another responded, "That's easy — pizza!"

Jeanne McIver leads the youth ministry program at Fairmont Presbyterian Church in Dayton, Ohio. The youth gather on Wednesday evenings, and the time begins with dinner at the table. At every table there are four adults and eight teenagers, and the places are assigned so that there is continuity from week to week. Jean ensures that there is a good mix of young people who talk easily with the young people who find it more difficult. This practice of the table creates intergenerational community within the church. Once she asked the young people to indicate by a show of hands how many of them ate regularly with their own families at home. Her own daughter was the only one who raised her hand. This is in Ohio — America's heartland — where we presume that our values still hold. This kind of shift in our social practice has implications for our society, in part because it has implications for our religious life.

Wendy Wright has written, "To prepare and share a meal together is one of the holiest acts in all religious traditions . . . . We may pass our meals in conflict or

with trivial conversation. Yet the power of the ritual remains. At the deepest level, the gathering in the dining room or at the kitchen table is an experience of communion in which the mystery of our mutual need and nourishment is played out. This is the level of our true hunger and satiety and the level on which we must encounter one another to genuinely know who we are."[7] Chuck Foster, dean and professor of religious education at the Candler School of Theology, teaches that we cannot grasp the meaning of Christian communion if we have not been steeped in the practice of the table in ordinary time.

Recomposing Self, Home, and World

A teaching video was produced in concert with the book *Common Fire*. It opens simply with a scene of a typical family dinner table with a lit hearth in the background. An incident in the production of this scene further illustrates the interrelated dynamics of home and pilgrimage in the formation of young lives.

After the scene of table and hearth was first filmed, to our amazement and dismay some simple, very inexpensive, glass objects that had been used as a part of the table setting appeared much too elegant. We previewed it with a few people, and sure enough, the reactions were strong and charged: "That doesn't look like any dinner table I ever knew!" Precisely because the family table matters in people's lives (either positively or negatively), we knew that the image might in any case evoke uncomfortable and even painful memories for some, and it was important that the scene of table and hearth be one that all who saw it would want to affirm. So we made a tough budget decision and decided to shoot the scene over again.

The producer, Terry Strauss, is not only an excellent artist herself, she knows how to put together a talented and committed team. The cameraman she chose, Michael Anderson, has received two Academy Award nominations. She chose his nineteen-year-old daughter, Sarah, to be the assistant producer. When the full team arrived to reshoot the scene in a specially rented facility, the proprietor said, "By the way, you can't use the fireplace this time. We had it inspected yesterday, and they say it isn't safe."

Terry knew that even if nothing was filmed, the crew would have to be paid for half a day. So she pleaded, "I just have this one Duraflame log, and we only have to burn it for five minutes." The proprietor remained adamant. It was a tense moment. Everyone cast about for alternatives, to no avail. Then Sarah suggested, "Why don't we put a TV monitor in the fireplace and run the earlier take of the flames, and it might look like a real fire." The crew looked at each other, thought it wouldn't work, but agreed to give it a try. After the shot of table and hearth was thus redone, they put the new tape on the monitor, by this time thinking there was

a chance that it might work well enough for untrained eyes. To their surprise, they all had to admit that even "trained eyes" couldn't tell the difference.

Having heard about the crisis, I was thrilled when I heard the outcome, and I said to Terry, "You must tell Sarah how grateful we are." Terry responded, "Sarah knows that her father knows that she saved the shot. Nothing that you or I could say would add to the splendid satisfaction of that for her." Sarah is moving from her homeplace out into a wider world, and she is taking on new responsibility. But in the midst of that pilgrimage, "home" is being recomposed in a new conversation between self and world. Home and pilgrimage constitute the forth-and-back rhythm of a single dance in the development of the soul.

A Larger Conversation

Table and hearth can be important in the formation of adolescent spirituality because they are natural places of conversation. As we consider "imitating Christ in an age of whatever," notice that Jesus always appears in common settings and takes the conversation to a deeper place. Whether in conversation with the woman at the well, or the rich young ruler, or Zacchaeus, or the men who were prepared to stone the woman who had been taken in adultery, Jesus is always listening to the deepest currents of the soul and moving the conversation to the essence of things.

Across college campuses students are asking for more time with faculty, and faculty are dutifully posting more office hours. But if we listen carefully, it becomes clear that students don't want more office hours. They want hearth. They want table. They want a back-and-forth rhythm of conversation that moves us from where we are to where we could be as it works its way to the essence of things.

In ministry to youth, we do something enormously important when we legitimate "real talk." As adolescents increase their capacity for taking the perspective of others while maintaining their own, they move into transformative space. The Quaker mystic, Howard Thurman, expressed it this way:

> It is a miracle when one man [he is writing as a man] standing in his place is able while remaining there to put himself in another person's place, to send his imagination forth to establish a beachhead in another person's spirit, and from that vantage point so to blend with the other's landscape that what he sees and feels is authentic. This is the great adventure in human relations. To experience this is to be rocked to one's foundations. We are not the other person. We are ourselves. All that they are experiencing we can never know, but we can make accurate soundings.[8]

One of the people we interviewed now owns a profitable software company and seeks to help his clients create an exemplary work environment. Reflecting on

his teenage years, he told us, "At my synagogue there was a woman who was a fantastic teacher who had a pretty profound influence. We would be Hebrew school teachers for the younger kids in a leadership development program. They were taking thirteen-to-seventeen-year-old kids and in the midst of our adolescent problems teaching us how to be leaders, literally, like the concept of active listening. That was taught to me when I was fourteen. I think it taught us all to become more empathetic and more discerning."[9]

Another told us, "We had a youth camp every summer, and then we would meet once or twice each semester for a weekend retreat. It was a group that was about something important — serious discussions about life issues — sex and politics and pressing theological issues. It mattered to me so much that in those groups there was an affirmation of honesty and integrity and pushing you beyond the bounds of what you used to think .... The youth leaders were incredibly important in affirming a sense of a wider purpose, affirming my concerns, and giving me responsibility for beginning to act them out."[10]

Indeed, "good talk" — transformative conversation among teenagers — is most apt to occur where there are adults who help to keep the talk good by providing ground rules about the kind of respect that we extend to each other and thus help to clarify the terms of the belonging that otherwise may become fierce and destructive. Good, even great, conversation can take form among adolescent youth when adults offer themes that legitimate hard, mind-and-soul-stretching stuff to talk about. When this kind of conversation happens, youth are initiated into essential practices of genuine community.[11]

A Larger Homeplace

Community, communication, and communion are all a part of creating a good homeplace. Adolescents are ready for a larger homeplace. It is only in recent times that we have come to associate "home" more exclusively with one's own domicile. For most of the humans who have lived on this planet, "home" has meant village or region — a wider sense of belonging. Teenagers want to participate in this larger sense of "home." They test a community's capacity to function as a place where youth can connect and belong and participate in play and sport, creativity and performance, caring and responsibility, believing and daring. It is from this kind of "home base" that meaningful pilgrimage can happen well.

Pilgrimage beyond Tribe

A particular kind of pilgrimage is needed in our time. It is no longer enough simply to go further afield geographically. Young people today need opportunities for pilgrimage "beyond tribe." As human beings, we all need "tribe," and adolescence

can be the most "tribal" of times — in the best sense. But if we are preparing young people to become citizens committed to the common good rather than to just "me and mine," the study represented in *Common Fire* provides compelling evidence that it is critically important during one's formative years to have "constructive encounters with 'otherness.'" Surely, a primary characteristic of faithful citizenship in our time is the capacity to move comfortably and respectfully across institutional and social boundaries.

As our society becomes more complex and diverse, there is an understandable tendency to move into gated communities, to fortify professional guilds, to create a cacophony of single issue politics, and to flee to fundamentalistic religion. In every case, the fear of "the other" abounds. Yet, increasingly, the art of being human depends, in part, on the capacity to live both within and beyond tribe — to find a good mix of home and pilgrimage.

In his work, David Ng has helped us to see that "diversity" can take many forms in addition to ethnicity, gender, and economic-social class. Wherever "us" and "them" exist, we have diversity — no matter how subtle. Discovering that "us" and "them" can be transformed into "we" is one of the most vital dimensions of learning during the adolescent years.

There are many ways that this can happen. For example, a bright, gifted young woman suffered a serious accident while playing basketball, and thus became dependent on the use of a wheelchair. While still in high school, she was invited to a national gathering of youth sponsored by a mainstream Christian denomination. She was somewhat dubious about participating because she was concerned about the patriarchal practices of the church. But she knew that this conference was making a special effort to include differently abled young people like herself, and she decided to attend. A dance was scheduled for the last evening of the conference, and she and another young woman (who also uses a wheelchair) debated going. In the end, they did go to the dance and watched from the edge of the large gymnasium. Then a young man from Latin America asked one of them to dance, and she accepted. He wheeled her to the center of the room, grabbed a chair for himself, and the two of them began to dance. Another young man went to the second young woman and began to dance with her in the same fashion. Within moments, the remaining five hundred young people went for chairs of their own, sat down, and kept dancing! "Us" and "them" became "we." While still cautious, this young woman has a renewed respect for the possibilities of church.

This is precisely the kind of behavior that we expect from faithful practices of the church community. Growing up in this kind of community can make a significant difference in preparing people to live in the midst of a society that is increasingly diverse. There are many, however, who believe that people only become compas-

sionate toward others if they have suffered profoundly themselves. To be sure, sometimes our own suffering prepares us to respond more empathetically to others, and often those who are at the margins of their own communities because of some vulnerability may more easily extend compassion to others beyond their own "tribe."[12] But there is another kind of "marginality" that also prepares people to respond in positive ways to the stranger. There is a kind of "value-based marginality" that we see in those who grow up in communities that practice an uncommon regard for others.[13]

At a time when we bemoan the "coarsening of society," the church can be a place where young people can learn to respect and include the stranger — the ones who are different from "us." It has been rightly said that justice is simply a matter of who is included and who is excluded, or who we can tolerate neglecting.[14] Indeed, if we are "imitating Christ," even a limited reading of the Gospels reminds us that Jesus was always blurring the boundaries between who was included and who was excluded. Thus, a practice of pilgrimage that encourages young people to venture beyond their own tribe and into the place of "the other" is well placed as a central component of youth ministry.

Many people are already giving young people opportunities to go on pilgrimages and to encounter strangers. One pastor makes it possible for young people to travel from Indiana to Vietnam. When they return from this pilgrimage, the young people talk with their parents about the economic disparity between the two societies. They have a new set of reference points as they think about how to live faithfully in a complex world.

Another pastor accompanies young people on a pilgrimage to Tiajuana, Mexico. In an interesting blend of home and pilgrimage, the young people assist in building homes for people who are living in the new shantytowns. When the young people return to their own homes, they have important stories to tell.

During the adolescent years, it is essential to return to someone who will listen to the story of your pilgrimage and receive the blessings you have garnered for your "tribe." Like young people in many other churches, when I was a teenager I went every year to a weeklong camp with the youth group. Each year when we returned to our church home, the Sunday evening service would make place for each of us to have a few minutes in the pulpit when we would share with the congregation what had happened for us. At a deep level, we were learning that our home community cared about us and believed that we had something to say and to give that mattered.

Homelessness As Invitation to Contemplation

The transforming pilgrimage awaits teenagers — sometimes across the world, sometimes across town, and sometimes just outside the door on the streets of our cities and towns.

According to Evelyn Parker, homeless youth are individuals under the age of eighteen who lack parental, foster, or institutional care and who survive on their own without a safe home environment. Estimates of the total number of homeless youth in our society range from 100,000 on any given night to two million per year. Every year, as a society, we bury 5,000 teenagers in unmarked graves.

Evidence suggests that young people generally have positive attitudes toward family and home. They do not leave home on a whim or because of peer pressure or conflict with positive family values. Premature separation from family support arises from abuse, poverty, or parent/child conflict.

Kathleen Sorenson, from Boys Town, says that some of the young people who come to Boys Town are sent by the courts, some by their families, and "one percent are 'pilgrims.' They come by themselves seeking refuge, asking for home."

The Power of Hope program does not have a particular focus on homeless youth, but in each city where it develops a weekend program, it seeks out the adults who are working with homeless youth. The program invites these adults and their young people to attend. This has been important both for the youth and for their adult leadership.

These reflections upon homeless youth in our society are not intended to set us on a guilt trip, but they may provide an occasion when we can ask as a people, as a "tribe," Why was the workshop on homeless youth the one that was canceled at the Princeton Forum? By what strategies might the response to that particular seminar be different next time?

When you and I return home, each of us will decide whether to file or toss the printed program for this Forum. Whichever we choose, I encourage us to turn first to the page titled "Extended Seminars" and use the third listing, "In Search of Sanctuary: The Quest of Homeless Adolescents," as a focus for our personal or communal time of prayer and meditation. Again, the question I invite us to contemplate is not, "Why did I not . . . ?" But rather, "Why did *we* not . . . ?"

Breakfast for the Stranger

At the end of the special section on teens in *The New York Times*, there is a story featuring Brian Raymond, who lives in Bangor, Maine.[15] Again in a strange choice of words, Brian is described as "legally emancipated" from his family in his junior year after his manic-depressive father tried to commit suicide, his mother had

an emotional breakdown, and his younger sister fell in with some notably uncaring friends (and is now in foster care). Brian has a friend named Zach, and Zach said to his mom, Mrs. Woodward, "Can Brian come live with us?" Mom hesitated. The article reports two reasons for her hesitation. One is that she cares about how she keeps her home. But that was not a major concern because Brian was a good friend who had been around a whole lot over the years. The refrigerator, however, was another matter. Would it hold enough of the drinks that would be required for everybody when you have a house full of more than one teenager? Finally she said yes, and Brian moved in.

Brian is now in his senior year, scored 1420 on his SATs, and is headed for one of the two colleges he has been admitted to. He has fit nicely into the Woodward home, where a study was converted into a bedroom, and a second refrigerator was purchased. It is the most home Brian has known. "In those places I rented," he says, "I just had a fridge and had to stay in the room. Here, I can sit down, watch TV. It's more like I live here; it's kind of cool." The article concludes: "Mornings at the Woodwards' are hectic. Mr. Woodward heads off to his job at the newspaper office, and Mrs. Woodward to her work at the Federal Building. The boys are always late and eat their pancakes standing at the kitchen counter. One is enough for Zach; Brian eats four.

"Mr. Woodward once asked his wife why she bothered cooking pancakes every morning instead of letting them grab cereal. She responded, 'The boys will remember those pancakes the rest of their lives.'"

If I'm reading the same Scriptures that you are, we know that imitating Jesus may mean that occasionally we cook breakfast. It may also mean that as a part of youth ministry we offer hospitality to the stranger as our souls relearn the deep rhythms of home and pilgrimage.

NOTES

1. Ann Powers, "Who Are These People, Anyway?" *The New York Times*, Wednesday, April 29, 1998, p. G1.

2. Note that for many youth who have suffered the divorce of their parents, the metaphors of home and pilgrimage carry a special meaning when they must regularly make, as it were, a pilgrimage from one home to another.

3. See Richard R. Niebuhr, "Pilgrims and Pioneers," *Parabola* 9.3:pp. 6-13.

4. See Sharon Daloz Parks, "Home and Pilgrimage: Companion Metaphors for Personal and Social Transformation," *Soundings*, 72.2-3, pp. 297-315.

5. See Sharon Daloz Parks, "Faithful Becoming in a Complex World: New Powers, Perils, and Possibilities" in this volume.

6. See Mary Frances Kennedy Fisher, *The Art of Eating* (New York: World Publishing Co., 1954) p. 353.

7. Wendy M. Wright, *Sacred Dwelling: A Spirituality of Family Life* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 61-62.

8. Howard Thurman, "Mysticism and the Experience of Love," Pendle Hill Pamphlet #115 (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Publications, 1961), p. 18.

9. Laurent A. Parks Daloz, Cheryl H. Keen, James P. Keen, and Sharon Daloz Parks, *Common Fire: Leading Lives of Commitment in a Complex World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), p. 42.

10. Ibid., pp. 42-43.

11. See Carol Lakey Hess, *Caretakers of Our Common House* (Abingdon, 1997), ch. 6.

12. Daloz, Keen, Keen, and Parks, *Common Fire*, ch. 3.

13. Ibid., pp. 74-77.

14. See Ronald Marstin, *Beyond Our Tribal Gods* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1979), p. 37.

15. Michael Winerip, "He's Getting By with a Little Help from His Friends," *The New York Times*, Wednesday, April 29, 1998, p. G11.

Global Issues Facing Youth in the Postmodern Church

Friedrich Schweitzer

"Peace is hell," say Fareed Zakaria in a 1997 issue of the *The New York Times Magazine*. "Peace is hell" — due to globalization.[1] Fortunately, this statement does not come from a new anti-globalist movement. Rather, it conveys the predicament of filmmakers who, after the end of the Cold War, have lost the enemy. According to Zakaria, moviemakers in a global world have been forced to resort to violence and to personal, instead of political, motives. Explosions are understood everywhere, and so is the concern of avenging the murder of a wife and a child. So at least in the movies, globalization may well correlate with yet another increase of murder and violence.

The term "global" has made it into general consciousness. Only about ten years ago just a few visionaries and critics would refer to the "global"; now, we find many references to it in the statements of mainline churches as well as in newspapers and even popular magazines. Some day in the future, the term "global" may well be considered one of the buzz words of the 1990s.

Yet, not surprisingly, the meaning of the word "global" is far from clear. In Germany, people speak a lot of "globalization." For them, the global is synonymous with the threat of unemployment. It is said that unemployment in the West and particularly in Europe is the natural consequence of an increasingly worldwide and open labor market that makes workers in Europe and workers in Asia compete with each other for the lowest wages. At the same time, economists tell us that economic globalization will ultimately benefit the whole world. Not only will globalization help to develop those regions of the world that have lagged behind; globalization will also lead to more economic interdependence and, consequently, will establish a firm basis for peace and cooperation.[2]

This last understanding of globalization in relation to peace and cooperation comes close to what the churches usually mean by "global issues." For them, it is the

global scope of today's challenges that is at stake and that they want people to realize.

Within the social sciences, globalization is often understood to be an extension of modernity.[3] This is certainly true as far as the mechanisms by which globalization is achieved are concerned. The familiar western patterns of capitalist economy, of functional differentiation, of specialization, and of individualization and pluralization have spread around the globe, which accounts for the peculiarly modern and often western face of globalization. Yet, theories of modernization have rarely focused on the international and worldwide processes of monetary and informational interconnection. If we are to take such phenomena into account, we have to consider modernization in a global context — thus going beyond the traditional understanding of modernity.

Another question refers to the relationship between globalization and postmodernity. Some interpreters assume that global plurality and diversity are extensions of the postmodern condition. Others claim that, given the global challenges of today's world, one should not speak of postmodernity since postmodern arbitrariness falls short of taking global challenges seriously. Theorists of globalization like Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens are quite critical of the concept of postmodernity.[4] While they agree that the traditional understanding of modernity has to be transcended, they feel that we should not become fixated on modernity by making it our opponent. Rather, we should move on to globalization in order to gain a new point of reference for our critical thinking.

Given the many facets of today's understanding of "global issues," clarification of the ways in which "global issues" are important for Christian education and youth ministry is necessary.

Finally, it should be kept in mind that the discussion of global issues and globalization is an emergent discussion. Up to now, there have been no definite results and no well-established theories. So we will be moving on shaky ground. We will be looking more for new questions than for definite answers.

Two Kinds of Global Issues: "In Front of Us" and "Behind Our Backs"

Not too long ago it was a widespread assumption in Christian education and practical theology that international exchange and global perspectives were pure luxury. According to this view,[5] the tasks of youth ministry are always related to the praxis of a particular church in a particular country, and so it was the conclusion that theoretical work in these areas should best be based on local pastoral experience.

However, things have changed since then. Over the last two decades it has become increasingly clear that Christian education has to address global issues if it is to face up to the challenges of our present and our future. Possibly, the first step toward this new awareness of global responsibility was the acute realization of the worldwide injustice between the so-called First World and the so-called Third World — a realization that originated in the 1960s and the 1970s. Next came the question of peace — both in respect to the nuclear threat between East and West and in respect to the many countries around the world where smaller or bigger wars are still going on — also a major topic since the 1960s and the 1970s. And finally, with the 1970s and the 1980s, the ecological crisis came into the picture, again with a global background of issues like the permanent extinction of species, the irreparable pollution of the oceans, and, at least possibly, a climatic change that would ultimately threaten all life on earth.

All these aspects of a growing global consciousness within Christian education and beyond are mirrored by the agenda of the World Council of Churches. The so-called JPIC movement — the movement for justice, peace, and integrity of the creation — may be seen as a corollary of these changes. "Think globally, act locally" has been the punchline of the educational and political efforts that are geared toward global consciousness-raising.

Especially for those who are concerned about the situation of youth, it is important to remember that many of the global issues have, indeed, first been identified by the younger generation. Often, adolescents and young adults have been among the first to realize the importance of such issues, and they consequently have tried to make adults realize what is at stake. The new social movements, as they are called in Europe,[6] almost always include a big segment of young people — adolescents and young adults who identify with the aims of such movements and who are highly committed to finding new perspectives at a global level.

Furthermore, it is important to note that Christianity has played an important role in this process of forming a global consciousness. The idea of *ecumene,* which may be translated as "the whole world," has important roots in the New Testament itself. According to Mt. 24:14, for example, the Gospel is meant for all the people in the whole world. Christian *ecumene* has been a vital motive for dialogue and cooperation among Christians around the world. According to today's understanding, the ecumentical process clearly includes issues of justice, peace, and ecology. More and more it is realized that this process must extend beyond Christianity toward other faiths and religions.

Much more could be said about these issues, which I term global challenges "in front of us." For example, there are many theological as well as ethical and educational problems concerning the difficulties of introducing children and young

adolescents to issues that are far away from their daily lives.[7] However, there is also a second kind of global issue of which we have to be aware. This is the global impact from "behind our backs" that affects youth almost everywhere in the world.

Impact from behind our backs does not mean the worldwide economy, which is sometimes called the "invisible hand." The economic aspects of globalization have become quite obvious and have rightfully made their way into the statements of the church.[8] They are among the challenges in front of us. What has received far less attention is the cultural and religious influence of globalization in our own countries. One of the most obvious examples is the global influence of the media or of other carriers of international youth culture. Modern systems of communication and transportation have made it possible for young people around the world to listen to the same electronic music, to wish for the same designer jeans and T-shirts, to watch the same movies and videoclips, to drink the same soft drinks, and to try out similar kinds of drugs. With email and the Internet available in many private households, today's youth may even actively communicate with each other around the globe. However, very little is known from empirical research about how all this actually affects the religious orientations of youth in different parts of the world. In many ways, what globalization does to Christianity and to young people in the church is still a mystery.

In any case, the distinction between the first set of global issues — global challenges in front of us — and the second set — global impacts from behind our backs — has important implications for education. Global challenges in front of us are problems that need to be introduced to the younger generation intentionally because otherwise these problems might not receive the attention they deserve. In many ways, the challenge here consists in raising people's consciousness to a global level. And this consciousness-raising is to be guided by ethical, religious, and specifically Christian values and ideals.[9]

However, global impacts from behind our backs are quite different. These are problems that actually affect today's youth independently of Christian education. The social, political, and economic processes themselves create a certain type of global consciousness, and often this type of global consciousness is neither beneficial nor ethically grounded. Rather, it is highly relativistic and ambivalent in its presuppositions as well as in its effects. And it is not based on Christian values or ideals. The educational problem here is the emergence of incoherent and disruptive forms of global consciousness.

It is to such consciousness and culture-shaping influences that recent studies on globalization are referring us. They tell us to change our perspective in order to see that globalization affects and redefines the local, and that it has its effects not only out there, but also in our own backyards. According to such studies, we have

to learn to decipher the impact of global forces within our own local world of Christian education and youth ministry.

If it is true that with today's youth we encounter worldwide processes of social, political, and religious change, then we will have to find methods and strategies that allow us to deal with such international influences. Our traditional approach to global issues in terms of global consciousness-raising needs a new, wider basis. We have to become clear on how the tendencies of globalization affect Christian education. We have to ask how globalization describes the condition of youth in the postmodern church — in the United States as well as in Germany or in other parts of the world.

Peter and Margret: Two Adolescents from Germany

Two young people from Germany, Peter and Margret, have something important to say about how globalization affects the younger generation.

In the early 1990s, Peter, a conscientious objector in his early twenties, published an article titled "We Are the Voodoo Children." From the beginning, the text is written to provoke the older generation and to oppose attempts at interpretation. "Do not attempt to understand us!" Peter says. "You may investigate us, ask us questions, interview us, do statistics on us... develop theories... have your results, and you may even believe in them. We don't care. But you will not understand us. We are different from you!"[10]

In Peter we encounter a remarkable insistence on autonomy in terms of the right of self-interpretation. No adult experts of education, theology, or psychology are to tell him what he is about. Only he himself has the right to state his identity. And this identity, he says, is that of "Voodoo child."

Peter says that he belongs to a generation that no longer possesses any sense of wonder. You can only wonder, he thinks, "about something that does not fit with a worldview." According to him, the worldview of his generation consists of an "enormous pile of unbelievable anecdotes that are too many to check all of them for their truthfulness." Now everything seems possible. "We accept everything and consider it as truth; we make it our truth because there is no more objective truth."

It is important to Peter that his generation does not suffer from this situation without "objective truth." He and his peers are just used to it. They are used not only to having a "free choice between medical doctors" but also to having a "free choice between gods." "We are separated from our roots and alienated from them," he says. "Arbitrariness rules. We are juggling balls in the hand of fortune, and fortune determines what we want to think. We are happy in spite of the meaninglessness .... We are the Voodoo children."

In Peter's report about himself and his generation, a number of aspects may indicate the influence of global factors. Voodoo is not exactly the indigenous German religion. Most likely it has made its way there through youth culture and media. This voodooism did not come to Germany directly from Africa or Latin America but more likely via the United States or England, or maybe even through some country in Asia. So international youth culture and media have clearly left their mark on Peter's self-definition, and so also has the international exchange of capital and goods. Peter's understanding of his relationship to God is modeled upon the western consumerism of free choice. The "free choice between gods" is the choice of a consumer following his personal preference as the basis for his transactions.

The story of nineteen-year-old Margret is different.[11] Her position is less defiant, and the influence of global factors is not quite as obvious. Yet what she says is more typical of German youth, and it will give us occasion to look for the more hidden influences of global developments.

At the beginning of her interview, Margret was asked to look back at the various types of religious education she has experienced in her life, in the contexts both of the church and of formal instruction. It is striking how little she can remember of what she was to learn there. She has a vague reminiscence of some biblical stories, but she is not really able to recall them. What has stayed with her instead is the pervasive feeling that there was no real connection between all that and her own everyday life.

Then, in a very important passage of the conversation, she moves on to describe her current outlook. She is not an atheist. "I am convinced that the human is not the crown of creation," she says, "and I also cannot say that I see myself as being without faith, but I don't yet know exactly what my faith refers to. Is it to a god, or is it just faith in something divine, a faith that there are certain things that cannot really be explained? I do not believe that, when we die, everything is over, or that only what happens here on earth exists. But I just cannot yet concentrate on the god who happens in church."

The "god who happens in church" — this is not a mistranslation. In the original German it is also a very odd statement. Nevertheless, it is quite remarkable. It shows how far removed this young woman in her late adolescence actually is from the church. She views the church, as it were, only from the outside. God, as she perceives him to be presented by the church, remains alien to her experience. Her everyday life, she complains, is not addressed either by this god or by the church that teaches in the name of God.

Thinking about postmodernity, her self-description in regard to her faith is no less remarkable. She sees herself as a person of faith, but she does not know what

the object and content or even the meaning of this faith is. In a different study of related interest[12] a sixteen-year-old girl says that "we believe in faith," an understanding that makes faith a purely subjective act without any content.

It is not easy to recognize the global background behind Margret's religious views. It would be possible to account for her statements just in terms of psychological development or in terms of the situation of religious education in Germany. However, if we do not limit ourselves to the more blatant aspects of globalization through economy and media, and if we look more closely at the cultural and religious dimensions of globalization, we come to realize that there might be important connections between globalization and Margret's experience of self and of religion. In order to understand these connections, we now have to take a further look at the social, scientific discussion of globalization.

Social Science Perspectives on Globalization

Within the social sciences, the term for what I have been calling global impacts from behind our backs is "globalization." Since this is a fairly new concept, it will be useful to start with a definition.

Roland Robertson, Ulrich Beck, and Anthony Giddens, among the leading theorists of globalization,[13] define it first as the process of turning the "world into a single place."[14] It is important to note, however, that there are two sides to this process. Globalization "refers both to the compression of the world and to the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole."[15] So both an objective and a subjective pole are involved. At least to some degree, then, globalization is a cultural process that entails psychological and educational consequences.

There are five aspects of globalization that are of special importance for Christian education in relation to young people like Peter and Margret.

First, theories of globalization confirm and underline the importance of international, worldwide, consciousness-shaping media and youth cultural influences. In a world that is highly interconnected, such influences do not stay in one place. The research on the change of values in the western world, for example, has made this quite clear. Changing value orientations in youth are not limited to any one country anymore. Rather, according to Ronald Inglehart, such changes spread out like a "silent revolution,"[16] and they affect all of the western world. Increasingly, then, youth culture and values will have to be considered as international phenomena. Does this internalization also mean homogenization of youth? The "McDonaldization" of the world certainly has its effects on Christian youth. But it also remains true that, as some more optimistic observers like Arjun Appadurai[17] have pointed out, such influences are always appropriated differently in different

parts of the world. Adolescents are not passive objects of globalization. They play an active role that should not be overlooked.

Second, both Peter and Margret show an amazingly high degree of reflexivity relative to both their autobiographies and their personal religious orientations. Yet this reflexivity is not to be confused with the consciousness-raising that educators have long seen as their aim. With Peter and Margret, reflexivity does not lead to clear conclusions or definite results. Peter's identity as Voodoo child does not allow for a sound religious position. Rather, it is his way of counteracting the permanent insecurity of a world with too many truth claims and with no chance to examine all of them. Theorists of globalization have pointed out that globalization goes hand in hand with reflexivity and relativization.[18]

All traditions are relativized. The consciousness of the world having become a "single place" includes the awareness of apparently endless possibilities and of the radical diversity of people and lifestyles around the world. Squeezed in between the plurality of religions and nonreligious options on the one hand and the narrow rationality of expert knowledge on the other, religious convictions come to be seen as relative and arbitrary. In this situation, faith becomes radically subjectivized — rather than being faith in God, it is turned into a purely self-referential process within the individual person. Or, to also mention the other possibility, faith turns fundamentalist by violently excluding all doubtful questions for the sake of certainty.

Third, relativization due to globalization also refers to self-identity. This is again due to the plurality of possibilities and options that a global perspective brings into focus. It is, however, also due to the mechanisms through which the process of globalization proceeds. These mechanisms have been called systemic in that they are not based primarily on individual people or on the actions of such people but rather on anonymous and impersonal systems like the economy. Over against such systems, the individual self is experienced as powerless and meaningless. In spite of this, the self becomes a "reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible."[19] Self-identity is no longer experienced as a given but turns into a task for each person. This explains the high degree of reflexive biographical awareness that we find, for example, with Peter and Margret, and it also explains the sometimes burdensome nature of this reflexivity. The metaphor of the "homeless mind," which has been coined for this situation,[20] captures quite aptly this feeling of being overwhelmed.

Fourth, theories of globalization speak of the "disembedding of institutions." By this they refer to the process in which social institutions are lifted out of "social relations from local contexts" in order to become "abstract systems."[21] Due to differentiation and specialization, institutions become separate from their environment. Especially in Margret's interview we encounter the effects of such an

institutional experience. Margret experiences the church as a modern institution. This church has neither been a part of her adolescent life-world through her parents, nor has it ever become connected to her life through Christian education and youth ministry. Rather, the church remains a specialized organization with boundaries that are clearly marked and that ultimately keep it separate from Margret's life.

The fifth point is the most controversial aspect of globalization theory. That is the privatization of religion. What is meant by this may clearly be seen from the experience of Peter and Margret. Both of them view their religious outlook as a most private matter. Nobody has to tell them what they are to believe — no parent, no teacher, and no school, but also no pastor, no congregation, and no teaching office of a church. In addition to this, their religious orientations are directed primarily toward personal or existential questions of meaning and meaninglessness. So in all these respects they are prime examples of what is called the privatization of religion. Yet we should not be too fast in generalizing these two examples. Critics of the assumption of a necessary privatization of religion have pointed out other examples to be accounted for — examples that may be seen as countermovements against the negative impacts of globalization.[22] There is, for example, the enormous impact of fundamentalist movements on politics — probably the most obvious type of deprivatization of religion in response to modernity and globalization. But fundamentalism is not the only case in point. More important, at least for Christian education and youth ministry within mainline churches, is the involvement of young people with movements around issues of peace, justice, and the integrity of the creation. This involvement may be considered as a contribution to a future–oriented civil society that is religiously motivated. Given the privatizing impact that globalization exerts on religion, civil commitment should be seen as a major aim for Christian education.

Global issues in the sense of globalization are present in our home countries and in our own churches. We have come to realize that the impact of globalization on the religious orientations of today's youth is at least ambivalent if not disorienting and disruptive. It may be supposed that the homogenizing influence of international media and youth culture plays a major role in this, but we should also be aware of more hidden influences like the relativization of tradition, truth, and identity, and of the "disembedding of institutions," which also may affect churches and congregations. Finally, even if there are more hopeful signs, we should be aware of the ongoing privatization of religion.

In all of this, however, we must also remain critically aware of the very preliminary status of globalization theories. Much of what is hypothesized in these theories definitely needs further corroboration. While this is true in general, it is even more true in respect to youth and to Christianity or religion. With youth and reli-

gion, there is very little research that would allow us to move beyond assumptions and suspicions about the effects of globalization. So if we want to become serious about globalization in our field, more empirical research that is based on international cooperation and comparison will be needed.

Perspectives for Christian Education and Youth Ministry in a Globalizing World

The main task of Christian education and youth ministry in a globalizing world consists in bringing global issues as the challenge in front of us and globalization as the impact from behind our backs together. We will not be able to bring to bear our Christian values and ideals for global life if we do not also take into account the more ambivalent impact of globalization. It is also true that we will not be in a position to adequately address the disruptive impact that globalization exerts on youth if we do not rely on our Christian and ethical visions for a global future of peace and justice.

But how will it become possible educationally to hold together these global challenges and impacts? Four perspectives could play a major role in this task.

A first response to the relativizing influence of globalization may be seen in a deeper grounding in the Christian tradition. If this has ever been needed it certainly is now. A superficial or purely emotional relationship to Christianity, church, or congregation will easily be eroded once it comes into contact with the multiplicity of competing claims, possibilities, and visions. But as important as the attempt at renewing and intensifying the teaching function of the church may be, by itself it will not be enough. We need to add a second perspective.

This second perspective may be called the dialogical and critical inclusion of other religious traditions and of competing truth claims with our teaching. Given the situation of global plurality and of the individualization of religion, it is no longer enough to just know one's own tradition. Rather, it becomes mandatory to develop an awareness of how Christian convictions compare with those of other religions and to consider what may be said about conflicting truth claims if the answer is not to be religious relativism. I am not arguing here for a so-called multifaith approach to religious education or for a neutral teaching about all religions. It is for the sake of confessional Christian education that we need to address other truth claims and convictions. Given the relativizing effects of globalization and reflexivity, there is no other choice. In an important recent analysis, Harvard psychologist Robert Kegan has tried to describe what he calls the mental demands of "postmodern life."[23] He comes to the conclusion that, with such demands, most people living in the United States today are just "in over their heads." A similar case may be built for the reli-

gious demands in a globalizing world. Many if not most adolescents — as well as Christian adults — do not have the skills to deal with the challenges and impacts that we have talked about.

Third, the dialogical and critical inclusion of other religious traditions and of competing truth claims leads on to what may be called ecumenical, intercultural, and interreligious learning. As has been observed many times by theologians as well as by religious educators, ecumenical, intercultural, and interreligious learning may no longer be considered a specialty that can be taken care of on the fringes of the curriculum. Rather, this form of learning lays claim to a central place within all religious education, both for the sake of peaceful conviviality between the denominations and religions of the world and for the sake of a more considered and mature attitude toward one's own tradition. This claim is especially important for education and ministry within the congregation because the context of the congregation is so seductive in terms of focusing on, but also limiting ourselves to, one and only one tradition.

Fourth and last are the global issues of justice, peace, and the integrity of creation that should continue to play a major role in Christian education and youth ministry. However, given the relativizing and privatizing influence of globalization, it will not be enough just to teach them as content. If we want to prepare youth for a committed life in the situation of globalization, we also have to show them how to enact such commitment. Thus, these global issues must be combined with the teaching of strategies for being Christians and building churches within civil society. It is at this point that ethical perspectives and global issues not only meet but also may be influenced and may ultimately be given a different shape that is more human.

Let us not forget that today's youth is not a hopeless case — not for the world but also not for the church. It may well be true that today's youth will teach us what it means to live in a global world.

NOTES

1. Fareed Zakaria, "Peace Is Hell," *The New York Times Magazine*, November 16, 1997, pp. 131-132.

2. For example, Office of the General Assembly, Presbyterian Church (USA), *Hope for a Global Future: Toward Just and Sustainable Human Development and Study Guide*, (Louisville, KY: Presbyterian Distribution Services, 1996). In Germany, there has been a comparable interest in ecumenical learning, see Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (ed.), *Oekumenisches Lernen: Grundlagen und Impulse, Eine Arbeitshilfe*, (Guetersloh: Guetersloher, 1985). One may also think of the ongoing debate on globalization and theological education. See Don S. Browning, "Globalization and the Task of Theological Education in North America," *Theological Education* 23 (1986), pp. 43-59; Alice F. Evans, Robert A. Evans, and David A. Roozen, *The Globalization of Theological Education*, Maryknoll: Orbis 1993; David A. Roozen, Alice Frazer Evans, and Robert A. Evans, *Changing the Way Seminaries Teach: Globalization and Theological Education*, Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary, Center for Social and Religious Research/Plowshares Institute 1996.

3. For helpful overviews see Malcolm Waters, *Globalization* (London/New York 1995), Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash, *Reflexive Modernization* (Cambridge: Polity, 1994), Ulrich Beck, *Was ist Globalisierung?* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1997).

4. Beck, Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

5. This view has rarely made it into publications but has remained implicit. Yet the whole body of literature from these fields bears witness to the national limitations of the pertinent discourse.

6. Cf. Karl-Werner Brand et al., *Aufbruch in eine andere Gesellschaft: Neue soziale Bewegungen in der Bundesrepublik* (Frankfurt/New York: Campus, 1984).

7. See Freiedrich Schweitzer, "Fuer die Heimat oder fuer die eine Welt? Religionspaedagogik im Spannungsfeld von Regionalitaet und Universalitaet," *Jahrbuch der Religionspaedagogik*, 1998 (in print).

8. See note 2.

9. This is the focus of the recent discussion on theological education and globalization as well as of the German discussion on ecumenical learning, see note 2.

10. Peter König, "Wir Vodookinder," Klaus Markus Michel and Tilman Spengler (eds.), *Deutsche Jugend/Kursbuch* 113, (Berlin: Rowohlt 1993), pp. 1-6. See my earlier comments on these two young people, Friedrich Schweitzer, *Die Suche nach eigenem Glauben: Einfuehrung in die Religionspaedagogik des Jugendalters* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher, 1996).

11. Her interview may be found in Comenius-Institut (ed.), *Religion in der Lebensgeschichte: Interpretative Zugänge am Beispiel der Margret E.* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher, 1993).

12. Friedrich Schweitzer et al., *Religionswunterricht und Entwicklungspsychologie: Elementarisierung in der Praxis* (Guetersloh: Guetersloher, 1995), p.139.

13. Cf. Waters op.cit.

14. Roland Robertson, *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992), p. 8.

15. Ibid.

16. Ronald Inglehart, *The Silent Revolution: Changing Values and Political Styles among Western Publics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977).

17. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

18. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

19. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 75.

20. Peter Berger, Brigitte Berger, and Hansfried Kellner, *The Homeless Mind: Modernization and Consciousness*, (New York: Vintage, 1974).

21. Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity*, p. 18.

22. Cf. Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization*, (London: Sage, 1994), and Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

23. Robert Kegan, *In over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life* (Cambridge, MA/London: Harvard University Press, 1994).

Imitating Christ in a Postmodern World: Young Disciples Today

William Willimon

The kids with whom we work and whom we attempt to reach with the Gospel are different from the way we are. Something different is afoot, and youth pastors are like the canary taken down into the cave — when the canary starts to die, you know that there is something wrong. Youth pastors are the advance guard for the church.

In every decade since 1960, Harvard's Arthur Levine has been doing a study of college freshmen in which he tries to capture the "metaphor" for each generation. When Levine discussed space exploration with my college generation and asked us what first came to mind, most of us said, "John Glenn" — John Glenn going up against the Russians, restoring national dignity and demonstrating scientific supremacy. But, when Levine asked freshmen in 1990 what their image of space exploration was, they replied, "A teacher getting blown up in the spaceship *Challenger*." There is a sense in which, when I look out the window, I do not see the same world a nineteen-year-old sees. We really are living in different places. It is a hard lesson for each generation to learn, but we are having to learn it, I think, in terms of modernity and postmodernity.

Where did the modern world begin? A good place to date it, Stephen Toulmin says, is with a teenager named René Descartes, who, in seventeenth-century France, like the rest of France, put his hopes in the ascendancy to the throne of Henri of Navarre. France, like Europe, had been rocked by a hundred years of conflict and so-called religious wars, and here was young Henri, an enlightened monarch, coming to the throne of France. On the way to his coronation he was assassinated, and all of France was thrown into a collective national depression, including young René Descartes. Toulmin attributes Descartes' intellectual program to this event.

Descartes, in his depression, went into an unused oven and started thinking. And how do you think? Descartes started thinking through doubting. The goal of

his doubt was to think more clearly about the world, to arrive at some base of knowledge that would be firm and secure. What do we do when the world is coming loose at its seams, when everything seems to be coming unglued? We search for some ground of certitude, and Descartes did this through doubt. Do not believe something just because your mother told you, or because the church has always taught it, or because this is the way they believed in your village. Do not accept anything on face value. Doubt. Think, "I doubt." Looking at the world this way swept away centuries of received wisdom. *I doubt, therefore I am.* To step back from something, think about it, use reason, and be objective is modern thought.

Already in Descartes, at this early date, we see the genesis of what would become the modern way of dealing with the world. We see there the birth of the sovereign "I," the ego, as the center of reality. The way we get reality is to start with the "I." "I think, therefore I am." *I* think, therefore the world is. Though we move out from the "I," we always begin with thinking by ourselves, for ourselves; the "I" stands in sovereign judgment on the rest of the world. Again, we think about the world by detaching from our emotions, our traditions, our past. We place our great faith in objectivity, whereby we strip ourselves of all preconceptions, preconditions, and prejudices, and we think. Going into the world with a kind of intentional amnesia and without preconditions, standing apart, and thinking — that is the way to find out about the world. This is the birth of empiricism and the scientific method.

Behind this is great confidence in our ability to understand the world. Newton said, "Let there be light," and suddenly reason opened the door to all mysteries. This is what Max Weber later called the "demystification of the world" whereby we were confident that we had within us all that we needed, right here, for thinking about, for understanding, for *grasping,* for *using* the world. This is why Francis Bacon invented the scientific method — not just for idle acquisition of knowledge but for *control.* The more we know, the more we can handle, grasp, and control in order not to be at the mercy of the mysteries like weather and illness.

Descartes also began the search for absolutely certain facts in order to lessen the conflictual nature of knowledge. Political conflict gave birth to epistemological conflict, says Toulmin, conflict over who knows what is going on. What is going on? What are the facts? You have your opinion, and we have ours, but if we could just find the facts, you see, if we could just uncover sure, absolutely certain, nonconflicted, uncontestable knowledge, we could have the *facts,* and we could all join hands and sing "Kum Bah Yah." There would be no trouble, because who is going to argue over a fact? Thomas Jefferson, that great Enlightenment God-hater, begins the Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal . . . ." George III, if you just sit down and think about this using objective reason, it will be self-evident, no trouble. I want to say, "Well, gee Tom, how

come we had a war over it if it was so self-evident? What was the problem?" The search for facticity was a search for unconflicted, uncontestable knowledge.

The spinoffs of this way of knowing were scientism, empiricism, and universalism. We longed to find large, foundational, overarching principles that would be true everywhere. We wanted to uncover human rights that would be valid universally. A common humanity. Kant wanted to find some basic principles that would be valid in spite of culture, society, or religion. Some have said the two great products of modernity were the atom bomb and the United Nations — two rather similar inventions to organize humanity, two great totalitarian gatherings. Let's get everybody together, and matters like race, nationality, religion, and language will melt before the force of large, organizing, general, universal principles.

There is in our time a feeling among many that modernity appears to be losing its grip on our imaginations. I noticed a number of years ago that I cannot stand up in front of a Duke undergraduate class and say something like, "Science has proven that," and then act as if that is the end of the discussion. They say, "Alright, thank you, science, could we hear from something else, could we hear another point of view, another way of talking about the world?"

The other point of view has happened in my adult lifetime. This is the movement some have called "postmodern." Leonard Sweet says that if you want to know what postmodernity is, think of the Energizer Bunny. That is, you think you're watching an advertisement about real estate or something, and then here comes this bunny banging across the bottom of the screen. He keeps going and going, and you say, "Oh, gosh. I thought I knew where we were, but there is more going on here in this advertisement than I earlier believed. There is more." That longing for more, that desire for a "thicker" description of reality, I would call *postmodern.*

There is in modernity a kind of "flatness" to descriptions of the world. Part of modernity's method was reductionism — the act of taking a bubbling, confusing mass and boiling it down to some basic, universally valid, large principles: the Three Causes of the Civil War . . . the Four Reasons for the Great Depression. Modernity, through the scientific method, asserted that you understand large things by reducing them to smaller units.

Here in the late twentieth century, people complain that their lives seem fragmented, disconnected, there is no big picture. When you walk into high school biology class: "Want to understand the frog? First kill the frog, open the frog up, take out all of its vital organs, cut the organs up into tissue, get the tissue down to the cells, get the cells down to the parts of the cells, label them. We've explained the frog."

Someone says, "Yeah, but you killed a lot of frogs." There are certain by-products of this way of knowing. A lot dies. The world becomes flat. There does

seem to be a yearning among many people today for a richer, thicker description of reality. I notice this among my students. I was part of a world that said, "That is weird, let's explain it." I have found with my students more of a sense of "Gee, that is weird. Let's see if we can enjoy it, experience it, and get in on it."

I realized that these students have had their way with me when a faculty member, typically middle-aged, said to me, "You know, it bothers me in your sermons that you do not spend any time lingering over issues like these: A man has just walked on water, how could that happen? Or, somebody has just risen from the dead, how do you explain that?" When he said that, I realized that my preaching has changed, that those kinds of questions and that methodology have become less interesting.

I have a friend who is the head of the Duke Alcohol Treatment facility. He has an expansive intellect. He is a physician and a psychiatrist. He is also a Christian from India. I believe that his being a Christian from India contributes more to his intellectual creativity than his education does. For instance, he has a theory that much addiction is related to spiritual ineptitude, that people who are spiritually empty and spiritually hungry attempt to assuage those hungers in self-destructive, inadequate ways with wrong "spirits." He notes that the most effective alcohol treatment program we know is A. A., which is explicitly religious, and yet there is very little literature on that sort of thing. He has developed a spiritual inventory; he has made some correlations between this inventory and addictive behavior. Yet he has not been able to publish his studies in one medical journal because he mentions religion. To the editors he says, "We are scientists, we are supposed to be interested in everything." And they say, "No, no, we do not do religion."

He planned a conference with me on spirituality and addiction. We anticipated that maybe twenty or thirty people — doctors, nurses, counselors — would attend. One hundred thirty people showed up. My friend began, "I know less about alcoholism than I did thirty years ago. Where did we get the name 'alcoholism'? Where did we get that word? Just to use that word is to close off the discussion. We got that word from the people who gave us 'appendectomy,' 'abortion,' 'tonsillectomy.' It is the way we remove things from moral discussion.

"There is more going on in this room right now than we know. This conference means more than is printed in the brochure. What is going on between us is deeper than we could express if we tried to take the time to express it. This meeting means more and will continue to mean more even after the meeting is over.

"The room is full of radio waves, and we cannot see them. We do not have any means of receiving them, but they are still there. I do not know why somebody would rather destroy herself with alcohol than live here with us. That is a mystery, and I am frightened by it. Out of my fear, I label, I pigeonhole, and I treat."

At that moment I thought, "Well, we have crossed some kind of boundary

here. We are groping for a thicker description of something than has previously been made available to us."

I think postmodernity comes to us through cinema. *Don Juan DeMarco* comes to mind. I saw that movie with a group of clergy. The young man at first appears to be badly deranged. He thinks he is Don Juan, and then the psychiatrist, played by Marlon Brando, attempts to treat him. By the end of the movie, the psychiatrist is not sure he is the psychiatrist, but he thinks this guy might really be Don Juan.

At one point the young man says to him, "How do I know you are a psychiatrist?"

The doctor replies, "Well, look at the diploma on the wall."

The psychiatrist continues, "How do I know you are Don Juan?"

The boy replies, "Talk to the women." By the end of the movie, there is a slippage between roles, and you realize how fragile are our identities, how wonderfully slippery is what we call reality.

My wife and I saw a movie recommended to me by my students — *Chasing Amy.* At the end of the movie, my wife said to me, "I remember a day, don't you remember a day, when gender used to be something you could count on?" You were probably a female, and you would probably stay a female. Or you were probably a male. But there is a kind of slippage today, and you realize how our terms like male/female do not make the sense we claim they make; we have to qualify them in too many ways. There is a scene in the movie where the young man, who is said to be heterosexual, says to his roommate, who has a problem with a woman, "You know, the only thing is for all three of us to have sex together. Would you have sex with me?" And the young man says, "Well, I'm free Friday." And you think, "Gee, everything is in movement here, and nobody is standing anywhere for long."

Or Ron Hanson's great novel, *Mariette in Ecstasy,* where you get a group of nuns in a convent in upstate New York, turn-of-the-century, and they're going about their daily tasks, but you have the impression that just beyond the convent there is something just bubbling out there. One day, when one of the nuns is washing, scrubbing the floors, she looks down and gasps — there is blood dripping from her arm — and she has received the stigmata of Christ. By that time in the novel you are not surprised, and you realize that somehow this novel succeeded in blurring boundaries and preparing you to be open to new insight. Revelation. She is driven from the convent by the end of the novel, and you see that you have convents and churches not only to engage us with God but to protect us from God. That is postmodern.

There is a loss of a center in postmodernity, a decentering. There is a suspicion of large assertions, including that one. It is hard to utter, in postmodernity, large, sweeping, universal claims. Too many people come to the microphone now who once were excluded from the conversation. It is tough to stand up and say,

"Well, we *all* know that," or, "I think we're in basic agreement that . . . ."

In one of his books William Placher notes, "Isn't it curious that we have four Gospels?" You might have thought at some point that somebody would have said, "Matthew got it mostly right and Matthew's Gospel is long, and it gets most of the good stuff in. Let's all go with Matthew. OK?"

Yet Placher notes that one of the earliest persecutions in the church was of the man who tried to harmonize the Gospels and put them all together as one. They drove him out and burned all those harmonies of the Gospel. Why is it curious that we have four, equally authoritative, canonical Gospels? Because, Placher says, Jesus of Nazareth is nonviolent, and the only way you get unity is by violence. You have to do violence to somebody's voice to get unity. The church knew enough about Jesus to be unwilling to do that — to silence a kinky kind of voice like John's.

That is premodern. There is a curious sense in which the premodern starts to resonate for the postmodern. This is a radical insight for me, because I am sure that I was told in seminary that if I planned to be a preacher of the Gospel, I had a big problem. My big problem was with *modernity.* On one side was this old, ancient, premodern, prescientific, naive world of Scripture, and over here there were people who used telephones and atom bombs. How could I bring these two worlds together? I labored translating the Gospel through existentialism, feminism, Marxism, or whatever I could get at. I tried to find out what the modern world could hear, and then I would try to crank the Gospel down to that. Here at the end of the twentieth century, therefore, forgive me if I am a little surprised that suddenly the modern world does not have to be taken quite so seriously.

We are learning that the modern world is nothing but a world; that is, it is a configuration of metaphors and ways of talking about and looking at the world, but it's not the world. Modernity is losing its privileged place among us. In her book Susan Bordo notes that there is a sense in which the modern world may be seen as a blip on humanity's time screen that lasted about two hundred and fifty to three hundred years in Northern Europe and some of its colonies, and that was it.

On campus, it is fun to bump up against Muslims and all sorts of people who just never got to the modern world. They never participated in the Enlightenment. They have not sat at the feet of Jefferson.

Why should Scripture submit to the canons of modernity before it could get a hearing? Why do we privilege the limited vision of modernity as being *the* vision to which all other ways of construing the world must submit? There is a kind of arrogance in modernity, epistemological arrogance, that thinks that we have in our brains the ability to understand, to grasp, and to use everything.

Modernity went hand in hand with capitalism, which tends to commodify everything. You might have seen on *20/20* or *60 Minutes* or one of those Sunday

night news shows their exposé on sex courses at Duke University. I had been out speaking in a Methodist church. I came in that night, and my wife said, "You're going to have a tough week. You should have seen this program on TV. They have a course here at Duke where they are giving explicit sexual instruction."

I said, "Gee, there was a time when they would have known how to do that naturally. How dumb are they?"

And sure enough an alumnus called me on Tuesday. "What are they teaching down there?" he asked. "I saw this thing on TV and these sex courses and all . . . ."

I said, "Look, this is called training in power and affluence. We are trying to train them to rule in this society, on this society's terms. And rich people have a lot of time on their hands. Since they do not have to worry about anything important like food or clothing or housing, they have a lot of time to do sex. We have them take these sex courses the same way we have them take, say, opera appreciation courses and accounting courses. It kind of all fits into the life of affluence and power."

The alumnus said, "You know, you are cynical!"

But, in a way, that is a kind of postmodern observation that politics is in everything. There is a real appreciation in modernity that all ways of knowing and understanding are linked to some kind of configuration of power. There is politics behind all that we think. Consider the kid who stands up and says, "Well, that is fine, and that is your opinion, and that is in the textbook and all, but I think the important thing is for me to think for myself." Why does he think he can think for himself? I could demonstrate that because of the Constitution, Buick commercials, and Wall Street, he is not permitted to think anything but that he ought to think for himself. It is the way we get them. So there is a nice fit between the dominant modes of power distribution and the ways we think.

All this is a bit of an academic, around-the-bush way of saying that I am impressed that *this* is the world of our youth. When we deal with youth, we are dealing with some very different ways of configuring the world. MTV has been a useful device for anesthetizing the young, but you learn a lot on MTV about the ways in which our perceptions have changed. I have noticed this when I watch MTV with my daughter. I cannot understand what I am seeing. There are no connections between anything. There are just images, constantly changing.

On the TV program *The Real World,* five random people are put in an apartment and videotaped. Someone asked me the other day whether I believed that we all were saved in Jesus Christ, and I said, "Yes, with the possible exception of the producer of that show, *The Real World.* That guy oughtta fry in Hell, but that's just an opinion." The only thing real about *The Real World* is that MTV pays for six months of psychotherapy after you get out of that apartment! That is real.

This says to me that we are experiencing radically different modes of perceiving; we are getting people who take joy in the lack of connections. I am reminded of Robert Alter, the Harvard literary critic, who says that, before the short stories of Kafka and the novels of James Joyce, we had forgotten how to read Scripture. We had lost the intellectual skills required (thank you, historical criticism) for reading and understanding the Bible. In Joyce's *Ulysses*, in just five or six pages, are Molly Bloom lying in bed, thinking; a page out of the Dublin newspaper for that morning; Molly's recollection of Michelangelo's statue of David; her thoughts of her husband and his inadequacies; the entrance of Leopold Bloom; a conversation between Molly and Leopold; and then, Molly's thoughts again. What is going on here?

Was there an early James Joyce and a later James Joyce and bad editing? No. What there is is a writer who is attempting to enter into the richness of human perception, the way our brains work. Alter says something very much like that is happening frequently in Scripture where there are different voices and different points of view and perspectives. I think our youth are again able to perceive such rich modes of representation. They yearn for a richer, thicker description of the world than that previously available to them in modernity.

Kids do not have many things they cling to with the exception of friends. Their world does not get much farther than just a couple of people they can really trust with their lives. This is a generation that has been raised by a lot of untrustworthy people. These are the first latchkey kids, the first generation of divorce — factors that make a difference in how they perceive the world. Right after I came to Duke, a parent asked me, "What do you think is the biggest moral challenge facing our young adults today?" And I replied, "Your divorce." A lot of that damage does not kick in until they are about twenty-three and making relationships. They have watched people whom they love fail and hurt one another, fail and hurt them. So forgive them if they are tentative, if they move in together and cohabitate for nine years while waiting for more data to come in before they commit to a marriage. People become like that when they have been hurt. They are reluctant to make promises in a world where many promises to them have been broken.

Young people are oral rather than literate. It's MTV. Life is a blip on a computer screen. The literate world hopes to fix things in concrete, on the page, forever. The literate world does its business by abstraction. Words on a page are abstractions from experience and concrete reality. Adolescents today seem to be returning to experience and concrete realities.

Today's youth are accused of being apolitical. In truth, they are very political, but in a radically different way than we expect. They have lost faith in large, systemic, governmental answers.

There is among them an unprejudiced openness to the claims of faith, to spir-

itual things. I used to think that was good news. Now, I am not sure. Continually I am amazed that they will talk religion and that they are curious. But they are indiscriminately curious. We get excited when two hundred young people attend a talk about "Monastic Spirituality Today," but those same two hundred show up the next night for a discussion on "Two Years with a Zen Master." They took notes at both sessions and believed both speakers. I do not know what to do about that cafeteria-style spirituality. At least they are open to the specific claims of specific faiths; they realize that all this cannot and must not be homogenized.

It is a time of dismantling — a time of great losses and relinquishments. The young white male, for instance, can be a dangerous animal right now. That is what Stanley Hauerwas said the morning after Timothy McVeigh was indicted: "The blue-collar white male is feeling that a world is being dismantled at his expense." What does that mean? Old ways of describing and grasping and old means of identity, by which some people built themselves up around other people, are crumbling.

In a course I teach titled "The Search for Meaning," I ask students to write papers in which they project where they will be ten years after graduating from Duke. Whom will they be living with? How much money will they be making? What will they be doing? The women respondents tend to express an "I-want-to-have-it-all" syndrome. They say, "I want to be ranked in tennis in the state." "I want to have three children." "I want to be a partner in a law firm." "I want to be . . . ." And I write on their papers, "You are a wonderful person, but you are not this wonderful. Think again. You're going to have to make choices." But I marvel at the unbridled optimism among the young women, who seem to say, "It is our time! Go for it!"

The young men invariably write papers that are pessimistic. "I will be living in a smaller house than my parents." "The economy is shot to hell. I will probably have to work two jobs." "I probably cannot afford to get married for years."

And yet, the papers written by women are written by people forty percent of whom, by the end of their freshman year, will have received treatment for eating disorders in some form either in high school or in their first year in college.

It is a time of relinquishment, pain, and exile for a lot of people. According to Scripture, this is a great time for us to be in ministry because we do well in times of relinquishment and exile. We do well when people out there know in their gut, "Something is missing; something is wrong; I am looking for a richer description of the world."

To be postmodern in the "age of whatever" is to believe that the Cartesian project was doomed to failure. There is no way to get unconflicted knowledge. There is no way to lessen the trouble of different points of view. There is no way not to have an argument. There is no way to avoid the peculiarity of our point of view. We are all speaking differently. I have trouble understanding you. I am male,

you are female. It is a postmodern willingness to put some of the conflict back on the table. To acknowledge our real differences rather than smooth them over in the interest of a false, imposed unity.

I end by saying that it is a great time to be Christian communicators and enactors because I think that as Christians we really do believe that all truth is relative. There is no such thing as "objective truth" — by the way, if you find any objective truth, go worship that. Worship of abstractions like "objectivity" is much easier than worshipping a Jew from Nazareth who is God. Christians do not believe truth is objective or universal. We believe it is personal, a person, a Jew from Nazareth named Jesus. We make the astounding claim that when we look at him we know all we ever hope to know about God and what is going on in this world as God's world. We really believe that we know nothing until we know him. He is the key to all truth.

Somebody asked the other day, "What is it like being on a modern, godless, secular, campus and being a Christian?" And I said, "It is a lot like teaching biology." That is, one thing you learn in a university is that there is no self-evident, unconflicted truth. There is no unconflicted, free-standing knowledge. It all has to be unpacked; it all has to be argued. The great thing is that we get to be there to argue our truth, the truth that we have not discovered by a scientific search of the world, but the truth that has come and discovered us. This truth that has come to us — Jesus — does wonderfully well on the postmodern campus.

I was talking to Marcus Borg from the Jesus Seminar awhile back. I said, "Well, Marcus, what do you have to say about Easter? How do you avoid the kind of Bultmannian, Willie Marxsen trap of the resurrection of Jesus rendered into just something the disciples thought up? Is it just saying 'He will live on in our memories'?"

And he said, "Well, I think the resurrection points to an experience they had."

And I said, "But Marcus, these were not very creative people, these disciples. I cannot believe that if they were thinking something up they would have thought up anything this interesting. I just do not think they were that original." No, I think they were assaulted by something not of their creation. That is part of the difficulty we have in talking about it; it is just so far outside the range of our rationality.

Anyway, to be postmodern is, at a minimum, to admit that there is a lot going on out there. There is a breakdown of conventional modes of discourse and explanation. But what a marvelous time, during a time of exile, dismantling, and relinquishment, to be there with a promise, to be there with testimony that says, "Alright, if an old world is breaking apart, that is OK. We were told not to put our trust in it anyway." What a time to bear witness that there is One who, even though we have used our great devices to keep out, is busy coming in.

At the end of our Easter service this year, a woman came out, grasped my hand, and said, "I have been alienated from the church for the last twenty years."

I thought, "Why do I need to hear this on Easter?"

Then she said, "I have always been turned off by the hypocrisy and the cowardice of the church."

I said, "Look lady, I work for the church. I know a lot more about hypocrisy than you do."

But then she said, "Would you please deliver a message to the musicians for me?"

I said, "Well, alright."

She said, "As I said, I have been alienated from the church, but today in the service, I found God irresistible and completely unavoidable."

I said, "Well, that is great. We would call that a victory here — just one person coming out and calling God irresistible."

And she said, "You know, I am a graduate of Wellesley."

And I said, "Well, we would call that a miracle then."

Imitating Christ in a Postmodern World: Making Young Disciples Today

William Willimon

When we talk about imitating Christ in an age of "whatever," we are talking about youth, whom I judge to be more adept in the practices of imitation than we are. They still pay attention to models and are busy looking for models. I find it sad that as we move into adulthood, we lose both those skills and that interest in imitation. When I first went to Duke Chapel, I was taken aback when I learned that the highlight of the liturgical year in the fall was All Saints Sunday. I found this strange because Protestants have not been that big on the saints. Then I realized that college students are desperate for models; they realize how important options are for adulthood. One problem is that young people have too limited a range of options, and All Saints is the day when the church sets out before them a wider array of examples of "success" than are normally available to them in this culture. All Saints made all the sense in the world.

So imitation is something young people are good at, something they do naturally. As youth ministers, we can work with that.

At the same time, we realize youth have already been imitating; they have already been inculcating and inculturating. Therefore, it seems important for us as youth ministers to spend some time pondering what young people are already doing. Marcus Borg and I were leading a group last summer from the United Church of Canada. During the week, someone asked, "Do you think as Christians we ought to be trying to convert people to Christ?" And I said, "Sure, give it a try. You are United Church of Canada, so it probably will not work, but give it a try."

Then I continued, "You know, I bet you are really asking the question, 'Should we convert them to Jesus or should we leave them alone?' But it is not as if they are standing nowhere. None of them is innocent. All of them are caught by something." I do not know why Christians should defer to late twentieth-century, capitalist, materialist culture over Jesus. Why would you want to leave them there? Why

not rescue them from that? That is conversion. The issue is not, Will you be converted into some form of discipleship? The issue is, Which form of discipleship will have its way with you? Worship is unavoidable.

At Duke we take those freshmen who are willing to go out into the woods with clergy on a retreat at the first of the year. We sit around the campfire. There are a lot of different religions represented on our retreat.

One night we were talking about religious differences and religious diversity, because there is a lot of religious difference on our campus, and one person said, "One thing that gets me about you Christians is that you are always trying to put the make on somebody. You are always trying to arm wrestle everybody else into believing as you do. And, after all, religion is a very private, personal thing, and it is nobody else's business what I believe, OK? So leave us alone." Widespread agreement in the group.

I said, "Where did you get the notion that religion was a private, personal matter?"

"Well, everybody believes that religion is a personal matter."

I said, "Alright, nine out of ten Americans believe that, but where did they get that? You did not come out of the womb on the first day of your life and say to your mama, 'You know, I think religion is a personal matter.' No, somebody had to tell you that. Somebody had to convert you to that stupid notion. Now where did you get that? I know Christians who can tell you the hour and the day and the place they were converted to Jesus, but how did you convert to the notion that religion is private and personal?

"You cannot remember, can you? But it is not because that is a fact. It is because there are some points of view that are so sanctioned by this economy, so thoroughly backed by this government, that they begin acting like facts. They start acting like reality, like "here is the way it is so adjust to it." If we had time we could demonstrate that because you are a North American and because this is the United States and because you are at Duke and because you made 1350 on the SATs, that there is a sense in which you are not permitted to believe anything more interesting than that religion is a personal matter between you and God. It is what we require to make capitalism work. We need you to do that to God to make the system run."

My little point was, *it is all conversion.* Somebody is going to have you. In the words of the great theologian Bob Dylan, "Everybody is gonna serve something." So nonconversion is an impossibility.

I have used this illustration before: My daughter at sixteen years old walked into a classroom. It was an odd classroom with nozzles sticking up out of a desk. The teacher started calling the roll. Someone started twisting the nozzle, and the

teacher said, "Do not touch that. Do you want to blow us all up?" What kind of classroom is this? The teacher finished calling the roll, and someone said, "What are those numbers up on that chart over the board?" And the teacher said, "You are not ready for that yet. Those are the sacred signs of our faith. Later I will tell you what they mean."

The first week is spent on safety rules, the practices of the faith. There is a way to take a stopper out of a glass flask. There is an exam at the end of the week. Students who pass the safety rules exam are given a white liturgical garment and goggles. The teacher says, "Now, I'll take you someplace you've never been. I will introduce you to a world you wouldn't have known if you had not signed up for this course. I'm going to show you chemistry."

There comes a day later in the semester when the teacher says, "Now I will show you the sacred signs and symbols through which we understand the world: the Periodic Table of the Elements. I will teach you to do things with these symbols."

About mid-December my daughter brought in some groceries and put them down on the kitchen counter. I saw her take out a box and heard her say to herself, "Heat-activated deodorant." Then I watched her. She flipped the box over and said, "I wonder what's in this stuff. It must be something that activates at about 98 degrees. Let me see what's in this stuff."

As someone in the conversion business, I stand in awe of that achievement. That teacher had only had her three months and had made my daughter a chemist. I had thought that teacher only wanted to give my daughter some information about chemistry. No, she wanted my daughter's soul. The practices of that faith are so much a part of my daughter now that when she looks out the window, she does not see the same world she saw just three months ago. That is an amazing epistemological achievement, and that was wrought in a public school in about three months. That is something akin to what youth ministers do or ought to want to do. It is all conversion, and an essential way toward conversion is through imitation. It is getting the moves, the practices of the faith, the gestures that make our faith possible.

When the Book of Acts wants to talk about how Easter got loose in the world as church, how does it tell it? Through a series of stories about people. I have heard people say, "You know, that is not a church. That is some kind of a hero worship cult down there. They just all gather around a pastor and think he is so wonderful." Well, that is how Christianity seems to work. It must have embodiment to work; it needs a person to be imitated. It needs a person who is busy imitating Christ and also reproducing others who can imitate.

Which leads me to a couple of things. The first skill, the first area of imitation, is that we want adolescents to know Christ — not to know about Christ, but to know Christ, to have a relationship with Christ. That really sounds Methodist, and

it is. There was no point where Christ ever said something like, "OK, do you agree with this?" or, "Do these six principles, these five fundamentals, these three spiritual laws make sense to you?" No. What he said was, "Follow me." Get on board with it. It is a movement, people. Join up.

Christian faith is depicted as a journey, and you are dumb at the beginning of the journey. A lot of times you are even dumber at the end of the journey. Jesus' disciples say, "We never saw anything like that. Look, even the waves and the sea obey him!" And, "Go, tell: he is risen!" They did not tell anybody because they were afraid, and that is a nice metaphor for how it feels to be following Jesus. We follow, in Mark's words, "at a distance." He is always ahead of us. He asks us a question, we give an answer, and it is not the right answer. Or, we ask him a question, he tells a story, and the story does not seem related to the question. Those are skills of discipleship.

Faith is not a philosophy of life. It is not a system of Judeo-Christian values. We do not believe in "values." Used cars have values, as Stanley Hauerwas says, people do not. Values will not get you anywhere. What we believe in is *discipleship*, that is, getting the moves down deep to where they become second nature, to where you do not have to think about them. It is just you. His call was, "Follow me"; take up a way of life.

In the university I meet many smart people who come to me and ask, "How can I believe that the Bible is true?"

I say, "Well, just try. If you work at it, it will eventually come to you." Or they say, "I do not believe in the virgin birth anymore, so that must mean I am not a Christian." They do not even believe in virginity! I have this image of God up there worried. "Has that nineteen-year-old believed in me yet? Check on that, this really means a lot to me."

Who cares?

In an academic community it is easy for me to get sucked into intellectual evasion. I try to argue, "Oh, you can believe this, try." Lately I have tried to discipline myself to say, "It is about following Jesus. Let us just say that for the next month you are not going to have sex with anybody to whom you are not married, I mean just for starters."

They say, "What the heck does that have to do with biblical interpretation?" I say, "Well, I don't know, but just try it. Promise me you will not do that. One thing we must convince you of is that you are sinful, because you probably think you are good. But if we could get you to lie, if we could get you to fall flat on your face, then we could work with you. We have a response to that."

They say, "Why is it that every time we talk to you people, you always want to talk about sex?" And I say, "Well, alright, I will admit it is not all that big a deal in

Scripture, but if we can convince you to say 'no' to unimportant things like sex, next month we are going to work on what kind of car you are driving. We are going to crank it up slowly as we convince you to renounce things in a society that does not have the skill to renounce anything." So we struggle with getting to "Follow me: It is a way of life."

I think the Jesus Seminar has been right about one thing, and that is that the issue really is Jesus. It is a walk. It is engaging. What the Jesus Seminar is wrong about is this earnest attempt to try to flatten Jesus out or to make him something that people mostly agree with. No, Jesus is an assault upon us, and following him is not pleasant. A kid comes out after the Easter service and says, "Yeah, we studied about this in philosophy, this is what Feuerbach said. You people wanted to live forever, and so now you have a God that is immortal. You just projected your need onto this God who gives you immortality."

I say, "Oh, that just shows how little you know. As you will note in the Easter stories, there are very few people who thought it was a good idea that he was back." They did not say, "Hey! God is immortal, and we are immortal." No, they said, "Jesus is back!" At first they thought it was a ghost, and then they said, "Well, he eats like Jesus." Having been harassed by him for three whole years, when he came back and said, "I am with you *forever*!" they wondered if that was good news. The message was not that "God is alive," it was that *this* God came back, and that was the problem. If we wanted to project a God, we could project a better one than this! We have shown, as Calvin said, that "the human mind is a permanent factory of idols." Unfortunately for our delusions, we have a Jew from Nazareth raised. That is the problem.

So, discipleship is getting into relationship, and I am impressed by how much training that takes. The courage to let God be God in Christ. The willingness to let God be God in the church.

I was preaching on the story of the rich young man who is confronted by Jesus, becomes depressed, and leaves. I thought as a preacher, "OK God, please preserve me from trying to smooth this thing out for them." I realize that the story ends in tragedy; it ends in sadness.

"How hard is it, Jesus?"

"Well, it is hard. It is like trying to shove a fully loaded camel through the eye of a needle."

"Whoa, that hard!"

"It just cannot be done. You cannot save rich people. But then, you know, with God, anything is possible."

At least, I thought, find a text that is dealing with a young adult in it. So I tried to just leave it like it was. On Monday morning I met the dean of the Divinity School

in the cafeteria, and he said, "Oh, did I feel sorry for you yesterday! That choir! That was the most 'down' anthem. Where could the sermon go after an anthem like that? Of course, the sermon was depressing and down because the anthem was so down. You have got to get those musicians to help you. The whole service was just down."

I said, "Yeah, that was just what I was thinking." I turned around with my tray and ran into the chair of the Religion Department. "What happened yesterday?" he asked. "We just sort of got it all out on the table, didn't we? And we did not know what to do with it, did we? We just could not think of an ending, could we? Well, that's alright. You are usually quite adequate on most Sundays, and you cannot be good every Sunday, can you?"

I said, "Yeah, that was just what I was thinking." I sat down with my breakfast and an Environmental Studies major came up to me. He started to say, "Wow. That sermon Sunday. I . . . ." I interrupted him, "Look, kid, I may have to take that from these other people, but I do not have to take it from you!"

He said, "You know, I just went home and lay on my bed and cried. I literally cried." And I said, "You wept?" And he said, "Yeah, wept."

He said, "I gave my life to Christ in high school. Someone told me that things would go better. I know someone told me that — that you give your life to Christ and then you have joy. But I sit there every week, and just when I get secure about what I am doing, I get hit from the back and then hit from the side. And I just lie there, and I ask Christ, 'What do you want? What would make you happy? Should I give up the bicycle? Would that please you? Can I keep the stereo?' It just seems like it is a relentless demand. It is hard."

And I said, "Do you see that aging, balding man over there? Could you go over there and try in words of one syllable to explain the sermon to him? Because I think you got it."

It takes training to come to biblical literature and be willing to be shocked by it, to be willing to be surprised. One positive aspect of this generation is that they seem to have a high tolerance, even a desire, for the weird. We can work with that. They do not immediately move into action, try to step on it, and explain it. They like to experience it. We can work with that — it is the response of "follow me." It is a great adventure, but it is not without cost. I realize again that preaching in a university, I have a high percentage of people who have been either unformed or malformed. They ask stupid questions of a sermon. A person comes out of church and says, "I know that you would never intentionally hurt anyone, but I was really hurt by what was said today." I think, "I do not even know you. Why would you think we would not want to hurt you? Oh, that's right. You do not know the rules of engagement. You are asking the wrong things of this gathering here." It takes training to hear sermons. It takes training to read the Bible.

Last fall, I was doing a late night Bible study on parables in a dorm. We were working on Matthew — the Great Banquet — and somebody read the parable. The invitation was sent out, and they rejected it. The invitation was sent again, and the owner became angry and said, "OK, go out and get the good and the bad. Go out in the hedgerows and bring in the good and the bad; bring them all in here." And the banquet was filled.

I asked, "Well, what is your impression here? What is going on here?" The students said, "That's nice. You know, God reaches out. God's kingdom, the kingdom of God, is like a big banquet for the dispossessed, the outcast, the forlorn, and the people who have nowhere to go on a Saturday. That is beautiful, inclusive, embracing, affirming."

Then someone observed, "You know, that does not seem to be the end of the parable. What is this?"

I asked, "Would you like to read that for us?"

The owner of the banquet comes in, sees a homeless man there, and asks of him, "How did you get in here without a tux?" Matthew says the homeless man was "speechless." He had been living out in a cardboard box just a couple of hours earlier, and his host wanted to know why he was underdressed. He is speechless.

Then the owner of the banquet says, "Well, I will tell you what you can do: you can go to hell." And to the servants he says, "Throw him out of here! Throw him out in the outer darkness! Torture him! Kill him! Get him out of here!"

A student commented, "Gee, I liked this guy earlier in the story, but he has gone berserk here. I have gone to a party underdressed, but don't you think that this is a little extreme? What has he got against homeless people? What is this?"

I said, "Well, Jesus does not seem to explain it here. Let's go on to the next story." The next story is the one in which the people ask Jesus, "Should we pay taxes to Caesar or not?" Jesus, whose pockets are empty, says, "OK, politics. Anybody have a coin?"

"We have a coin."

"Well, whose picture is on it?"

"George Washington's."

"If he likes this stuff enough to put his picture all over it, give it back to him. It is sort of sad when you need to put your picture on a piece of metal to feel good, but, OK. It is Caesar's, let Caesar have what is Caesar's, but you be careful to let God have what is God's."

The students just sat there. "OK. What is the point? What kind of answer is that?" I said, "You are reminding me that he did not really get an answer."

"What is Caesar's?" one student asked.

"What is God's?" asked another.

Then someone said, "You know, I guess when it comes to what is Caesar's and what is God's, it is just hard to know. I guess we are just permanently uneasy." Someone else added, "I guess Jesus has nothing against making people uneasy — permanently." And another chimed in, "You know, this is ironic. I come up here for a Bible study at ten in the evening so I can get close to God. But it is kind of odd. I was closer to God thirty minutes ago than I am now! I thought I knew God, but after Jesus tells these stories nobody knows for sure."

I said, "It takes skill to read these stories of Jesus'. It takes time to develop the ability to let Jesus tell you these stories without hating him for it." That is a skill. It is a set of practices inculcated in us by the church.

I agree with Aristotle when he said that it is too much to ask ordinary people to be good. About the best you can hope for with ordinary people is to teach us good habits. It might be fun in your congregation to list habits you need to be a follower of Jesus today. In my last congregation we wrote down the following necessary habit: By age six every child in this congregation will know by heart the Apostles Creed, the Lord's Prayer, and the *Gloria Patri.* They will not have to *understand* them (we are not sure *we* understand them), but they will know them by heart. That's a nice phrase: "by heart." The words will be written on their hearts. They will have the words deeply embedded in them.

My colleague Rick Lischer, who wrote a great book on the preaching of Martin Luther King Jr., asks, "How do you interpret Scripture? Well, you come to a seminary like this one, and you learn to interpret Scripture by stepping back from it. Do not get emotional; do not get too involved; do not worry about what your mother taught you. Deal with it like a cadaver on the table, then start taking it apart. Get it all ripped apart down to each verse, each word. Do a Greek word study on each word. Now, it is hard to find much to say after it is all split apart, out on the table. You finish, and you know nine things you cannot say about this text, but you cannot think of the one thing you *can* say.

Lischer continues, "In the African American church, which King was a part of, there is a different epistemology at work, a different Bible study, one that says: The way you understand Scripture is to put yourself *in* it." Do not get detached from it; get into the text; find some door — King used that expression — to get into the text. Put on the text; strut around in it a bit; take different places in the story, and act those out. Embody those in your sermon. Dramatize those. Two different ways of understanding — one, I think, is more faithful to the Bible's intent.

My wife teaches a Bible study for graduate students called Disciple Bible Study, which was started by the Methodists and is a great success story. In it, participants read straight through the Bible in a year, and there is homework — three hours a week of assignments. When they reached Leviticus, she said, "Pray for me, I have

reached Leviticus tonight." I knew what she meant. She had a couple of gay men in the Bible study. So, she started into Leviticus, and one of these people spoke up. "OK, I will admit it, I have been anxious all week that we were moving into Leviticus. Leviticus. Bad. Got some bad stuff to say. But this week was a revelation to me. I thought they were saying that my orientation was an abomination. Well, you get into Leviticus and find out that nearly *everything* is an abomination. Like the way you prepare meat — as if God has an opinion about that, too." And he said, "I do not want to point any fingers, you know who you are, but there are people who come here to this prayer time during their menstrual cycles. You know who you are. That is a no-no." Then he said, "I think maybe the rule for reading Leviticus is that you should not read Leviticus unless you read the whole thing, start to finish, like we had to do this week. Just read the whole thing, take it whole. That is really helpful."

And then someone asked, "Why would God have an opinion about preparing food, and how you have sex, and how you treat farm animals?" (I remembered Stanley Hauerwas quoting a rabbinical friend of his who said any God who does not have an opinion about your pots and pans and your genitals is not worth worshipping.) By the end of the Bible study, that student was able to ask, "Am I willing to serve a God who has opinions about such intimate, everyday, ordinary, mundane matters? Can I live with that kind of God?" That takes skill, that takes time — because we are not conditioned to read like that.

It takes a language. This is one way youth ministers can help. Being a Christian on a large secular campus is somewhat like being a chemist. Christianity is a different language, and there is no way for people to understand immediately what you are talking about. If you have a conversation with a chemist, you are probably going to have to get some translation. You are going to have to have some explanations. You are going to have to sit for a time. You do not walk in and say, "I have never heard this before. That must invalidate it."

My daughter complains that when she takes a course in psychology, all they learn is vocabulary until the end of November. They do not get to the psychology until December. It is all vocabulary. Well, there is no way around vocabulary like "sanctification" and "redemption." There is no way around having to unpack what Scripture means when it says "poor" or "kingdom of God" or "child." There is a lot of vocabulary work to do. Youth ministers are working with young people who spend all day long doing this, and so they might have greater facility in this than some older Christians.

A friend of mine who is a pastor said that a young woman in his Massachusetts congregation said, "I am trying to get the words right. I am trying to get the right words."

He asked, "What do you mean? Sanctification? Atonement?"

She said, "I caught myself the other day, and I said, 'Gee, I made a mistake there. I screwed that up.' Then I used the word 'sin.' That was not just a slip up, that was, like, a 'sin.' I am trying to say that. I am trying to get the right words."

It is not "male"/"female," it is "brother"/"sister." It is not "natural"/"supernatural," it is "creation." There is a huge difference in the way those labels are used, and it is tough because so many times the church tries to talk about Jesus with an alien language. We have a debate over "abortion." Where did we get the word abortion? Who gave us that word? The same people who gave us "tonsillectomy." Who gave us the word "homosexuality?"

Related to this language issue is training in submission to Scripture. To be in the church is to play, as Walter Brueggemann says, "a certain language game." I do not use that word pejoratively, but simply to say that when we come together at eleven o'clock, we privilege certain communication over others. The Bible becomes a kind of privileged book. We are not free to go to other texts until we do business with this text. We play a kind of game that says, "Let us all get together and for just one hour act like these ancient Jews knew more than we do. Let us just try that and see where we are by noon." Let us not do the modern thing that takes a superior, arrogant position in relation to everybody who was here before us. Let us just assume that we live in the most violent culture maybe ever created, namely, American democracy, and we have lived through perhaps the most violent century. We are not in a great position to take a privileged position with Scripture.

Another challenge for youth ministers is that it is counter-cultural work to teach young people to look for a "vocation" rather than a job. One of the saddest characteristics of our youth is that so many of them have to live uncalled lives. A lot of people out there have not been called. They have no greater claim on their lives than their own selfish ambition. They have nothing better to live and die for than themselves, or mutual orgasm, or whatever else this world promises.

Some of the greatest moments in youth ministry happen when you grab somebody by the collar and say, "Hey, kid, come over here. You, try elementary school teaching. You, try nursing. You, ..." In college I meet so many who are just desperate for an adult to say "You know what you are good at?" "You know what we could use from you?" They are hungry for that.

I have had some marvelous experiences working with youth. For example, a couple hundred students gathered to listen to the representative from Teach for America who came to campus. She walked out on stage and said, "I did not think anybody would be here tonight. This is Duke, isn't it? But I can tell by looking at you that this is probably a waste of your time. You are all successful; you can get a job on Wall Street; you can be making $40,000 easily when you get out of this place. And I am looking for a few people to go out and make under $20,000 a year and

work in some of the most violent, difficult school situations in this country. And I can tell by looking at you, that any of you can do better than that. We had two teachers in our program killed last year. But I have brochures here, and if any of you wants to pick one up, help yourself. Thank you for coming."

Well, with that, they started pushing and shoving and knocking people down. They fought over those brochures. And I sat there as somebody in the vocation business thinking, "You know, *she is good.* The woman is good. She knows what she is doing here."

Youth ministers need to nurture the joy of being odd. At the Youth Specialties conference, a huge guy walked up to me dressed entirely in leather, black leather, with a huge iron cross around his neck, no shirt. He walked up to me and he said, "Man, that was good what you just said, that was good."

And I said, "Do not tell me you are a youth minister."

He said, "Yes I am. The Lord has used our ministry in powerful ways up in Northern California."

I repeated, "You are a youth minister?"

He said, "Yeah, the Holy Spirit has taken off with our ministry. We have three hundred on a Sunday night."

I said, "I would certainly do anything you asked me. If it would help I would be born again, I would believe in a six-day creation, I would get saved — anything, if it would keep you away from me."

He said, "Hey man, I'm nonviolent. I am following Jesus."

And I said, "And we give thanks for that, too."

A number of years ago, Walter Brueggemann wrote a little book on evangelism and youth ministry. One of his chapters was titled "The Successful Youth Minister Needs to Be a Fool." He was saying the youth worker needs to be weird, a fool for Christ. Kids love that. Youth ministers represent for our kids this visible alternative to the other limited models of adulthood they are getting. Many youth ministers are subversive even when they are not trying to be subversive.

"Imitate me. You have a worthy example in us!" was one of the wildest things Paul ever said. It was not just a onetime slip of the tongue; he says it in about four different places. He says, "You want to know what your assignment is? Imitate me. OK? You got that?" I wondered, "Is there no limit to his arrogance? Alright, he is St. Paul, but still." But then I thought: he is simply being honest. It is all imitation.

One of the burdens of youth ministry is that youth are always staring at you. That is why I do not work out at the college gym anymore. I have enough problems in life without some nineteen-year-old staring at me and thinking, "God, will I look like that at fifty?" They are always looking at you, and that is exactly what they should be doing. There is none of the liberal "Hey, people, I am going to lay out a

few ideas here on the table. None of them is mine necessarily, and you do not have to accept any of them to pass the class. Just roam around here and take what you want." There is none of that, which is also a way of being dishonest and manipulative. No, Paul knows it is the nature of the Gospel that it demands to be embodied, and if it is not embodied, it is false. It is only interesting because people are living and dying by it. So imitation is part of it, and that is part of the burden of being called to this ministry — to let your life be exposed to their searing gaze.

It's frightening to have power over people in that way. Use it carefully. Be aware of how powerful you are. You think you are not powerful because you are not being paid much, but you kill and make alive. A lot of your kids will never get over you. Some of them are going to get hurt because of you, so you better be sure of what you are calling them to.

There are wonderful moments where they become agents of your vocation, and they recall you, call you back to why you made this move in the first place. At our house one Sunday afternoon, we invited a group over after chapel. Some were playing basketball, and others were sitting out on the deck. One student said to me, "You know, you have a wonderful place here."

I said, "Thank you."

He said, "I love the woods, too."

I said, "That's what we like about it."

And he said, "You know, the deck and everything is so attractive."

"Thank you."

He said, "Does it bother you as a Christian, living in such a nice house?"

And I said, "Now I am remembering why it was not a good idea to invite you people over here."

He said, "Well, I did not mean to be offensive."

And I said, "You are. That was just a perfectly appropriate question, because to be in the church means to hold each other accountable. Thank you."

When I was walking across campus with another student, he asked, "Have you found it difficult to love one woman?"

I said, "Why are you asking this? Has the president sent you over here?"

He said, "I am dating a person, and we may be moving toward marriage, but I am just thinking, I cannot imagine there is any point when I would, like, just desire one woman."

I said, "That is why we put you through the marriage service. In the marriage service we make you promise to desire one woman. We just make you promise in front of God and stand you up in front of everybody. That is what that is all about."

He asked again, "Have you found this difficult?"

I said, "I think it gets easier to keep these promises the longer you keep them.

The longer you keep them, the more you become these promises, and they become second nature to you."

He said, "Oh yeah, that's right. I guess, like, when you get to be your age it is really easy to keep these promises."

I said, "You know, sometimes we slap students."

It is in moments like this that I am grateful that I am working with these people, these sisters and brothers who are younger and less experienced in the faith, but who do not know any better than to ask marvelously appropriate questions of me. At that moment I begin to get a glimpse of what the Body of Christ ought to be. They call us forth. In putting yourself out on the line and saying, "OK, imitate me," you get into a marvelous situation where you become better than you would have been if you had been left to your own devices and if these kids had not been tethered to your life in any way. In better moments, you say, "God, thank you for letting me be here because, if I had not, who knows what I would have been like without these young Christians."

The good news is that Christ is still able to evoke the church he deserves, and he still is able to call the disciples he wants and needs. It is a marvelous thing being there. A marvelous thing.

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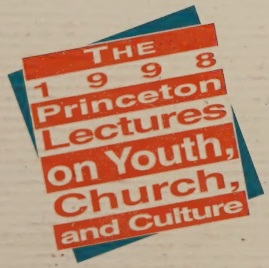

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